

**The Green Line: An Investigation of the
Arabization of the Playwriting Process Through
an Exploration of Intergenerational Memory**

MAKRAM AYACHE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE
STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE
ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN THEATRE
YORK UNIVERSITY,
TORONTO, ONTARIO

April 2019

© Makram Ayache 2019

ABSTRACT

The author examines the limitations and potential in the "Arabization" of the playwriting process through an exploration of the Lebanese Civil War and the inheritance (or erasure) of intergenerational memory. Through a series of studio and written explorations, the author investigates conventional play-writing techniques and questions the capacity to de-center the locus of knowledge from a European lens. The two-year exploration culminated in the play "The Green Line," which in and of itself is a discussion of transmigration and racial/ethnic building identity politics. The author interrogates the effectiveness of the "Arabization" endeavor and discusses findings that point to the potential ways the exploration failed and succeeded.

DEDICATION

To my family always.

To Brent Franco Saccucci who ignited this journey within me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout the writing of this thesis, there are many who supported and assisted the process. First, I would like to thank my supervisor Paul Lampert and my second reader, Erika Batdorf. Their time and energy were instrumental in guiding the studio and theoretical explorations undertaken throughout this project. I also want to thank my third reader, Patrick Alcedo, who's insights contributed meaningfully to the final thesis. To the artists who instructed me during my time at York: Mark Wilson, Anita La Selva, Anna McKay Smith, Dr. Ross Stuart, Peter Hinton, Gwentyth Dobie, and Eric Armstrong. Thanks to their leadership and guidance. Many thanks for Susanna Talanca and Mary Pecchia whose support, gratitude, and grace help kept everything running effectively. I would like to thank Abigail Shabtay who furiously believed in my intellectual and academic capabilities.

Next, I wish to thank the Performance/Creation cohort: Gülce Oral, who taught me what honest movement felt like, Desirée Leverenz, who taught me what passionate artistry looks like, Jason Hildebrand, who taught me what compassionate faith can achieve, and Mallory Fisher, who taught me the marriage of erudition with emotionally tenacity. I'm indebted to each of them and their marks are undoubtably left on these documents.

Next, I wish to thank the acting and directing cohorts who were a vital part of my learnings at York. I am lucky to have learned alongside a group of multitalented and generous artists.

Next, I wish to thank my students who were such a source of light and inspiration each semester at my time at York. I am grateful for the learning they offered with their wide-eyed ambition and hard work.

Finally, always, thanks to my family, Mom, Dad, Angie, Alaa, and Mahmoud, whose love inspires all my questions and art making. Equally important, I wish to thank Brent Franco Saccucci and Kevin Saccucci, who are my muses and continually teach me about unconditional love. I want to express the deepest gratefulness for Joshua Ricci, who supported me through many nights of insecurity through the process of writing this thesis. Lastly, I want to thank Mel Bahnuik, Chris Pereira, Lauren Hughes, Sarah Emslie, Helen Belay, Michael Anderson, Griffin Cork, Diego Stredel, Marguerite Lawler, and Leila Raye-Crofton who will always make up an important part of my artistic heart. It takes a village, as they say, and the gratitude is extended to all the friends and family that have supported and loved me through this process.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CONTENTS	v
ARTISTIC CHALLENGE	1
The Canadian Theatre Landscape and Beyond	1
Intersectional Social Resistance in Theatre Art:	1
The neoliberal context of Canadian theatre	3
Decoloniality through a queer and feminist lens	5
Strategic Essentialism.....	8
The Playwright as the White Patriarch (And What Could Be).....	9
An Arab (And a Western-Arab) Playwright: Memories and Imaginations.....	10
Critical and Hopeful Dramaturgy	13
PERFORMANCE RESEARCH.....	15
The Play and the Process	15
Inspirations.....	16
Vital Queer Experiences	19
DISCUSSION	21
A Colonized Imagination	21
An Unspecified Arab City	22
Canadianized or Colonized Arab	23
Conclusion	25
WORKS CITED.....	27
APPENDIX A: PRODUCTION OF THE PLAY.....	28
Creation and Production Time Line.....	28
Casting	29
List of Collaborators	29
Funding Overview	31
Audition Notice.....	32
Detailed Rehearsal Schedule	34
APPENDIX B: SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRIES	37
APPENDIX C: FULL SCRIPT	43

ARTISTIC CHALLENGE

The artistic challenge I am undertaking is the Arabization of the playwriting process through a queer and feminist lens. I inquire into what it means to invite an Arab way of knowing in order to create and produce a theatrical production. I do this partly in solitude, and partly with a team of Arab artists as we explore the provocation: how does intergenerational memory and trauma sit with us today? My hope is to begin the development of a process which can be adopted by other groups historically marginalized by Euro-centric and patriarchal ways of knowing, but of course it is the discoveries throughout the thesis research which inform the outcome of this challenge.

The Canadian Theatre Landscape and Beyond

It would be difficult to discuss an inquiry into the Arabization of the playwriting process without examining the contemporary Canadian theatre landscape first. With a push for intersectionality across theater companies and granting bodies, I care to examine several key aspects that impact my artistic challenge. The first is the concept of intersectional social resistance. Second, I will discuss the neoliberal context of artistic production. And finally, I will examine the concept of ‘decoloniality’ (Mignolo, 2002) through a queer and feminist lens.

Intersectional Social Resistance in Theatre Art:

Intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, is a theory attempting to make sense of the often layered and over-lapping barriers that black women face in America, specifically in relation to employment (Crenshaw, 1989). She observed that black women faced unique and amplified forms of discrimination that are too specific to their overlapping experience and separate from how black men and white women independently experience labour discrimination. It’s important to note that this theory came out of the experience and was

speaking into the experience of black women. However, it has been adopted and expanded in feminist theory to make sense of overlapping identities across many communities. And now, intersectionality is generally a commonly utilized term used by queer, racialized or disabled activists and academics. Through its lens, politics of domination and submission are seen more potently and the dialogue for the complex interworking of diverse groups becomes more apparent.

This intersectional lens is becoming an increasingly common practise in most theatre companies and granting bodies. Because of the work of activists, academics, and artists, these legitimizing forces in Canadian theatre are attempting to respond within their existing frameworks. It isn't unusual to find equity efforts from theatre training programs, professional theatre auditioning processes, or granting bodies that target historically underrepresented groups. This concerted effort is not unnoticed, but the issue of legitimacy remains. Although intersectionality has become an important decision making factor of many of these organizations, theatre leadership remains saturated in a predominantly white, euro-centric male way of knowing. Thus, I don't know if the effort to shift this is authentically there. I argue that there is deep resistance in sharing space for those with legitimizing abilities in Canadian theatre. Equitable hiring practise and efforts can sometimes give the façade of social justice, but a change in leadership is required to accurately and justly reflect the people who make the Canadian theatre landscape. This leads to the question of legitimacy. So long as euro-centric leaders remain at the helm, their inherent and learned sensibilities will be deemed legitimate, making an expansion of other ways of knowing impossible.

Intersectional social resistance, then, is not only about producing canonical Canadian theatre work that is created from the experience of historically underrepresented people, but also

giving those people positions of authority. This doesn't mean that these positions are handed out to any one because of their identity, but rather a concerted effort in shifting our focus from euro-centric and white-normative ways of knowing will be useful in shifting legitimacy. This new legitimacy is what my artistic challenge is concerned with. And even though I am a queer Arab body conducting this research and artwork, I find it difficult to legitimize non-euro-centric ways of being. So I invite an intersectional understanding so as to critically assess my own practise. This is made more complex in the neoliberal context of the Canadian theatre, where I will not be able to even contribute as an artist if I don't produce exactly as is expected to be produced.

The neoliberal context of Canadian theatre

The neoliberal and Euro-capitalist state of affairs leaves little room for artistic risk taking. This concept, derived from a Marxist analysis of distribution of wealth and power, says that "individualization and competitiveness" is the ultimate value which a society can hold (Gallagher and Rodricks, 2017). In effect, neoliberalism consciously nurtured meritocratic individualization which appeared to act in the interest of all, but subversively allowed the rich to become elites and the middle class to chafe down into an enormous pool of poor labouring class. Simply put, the American dream of the 40s mutated into a feudal capitalism. And worse, the typically marginalized descended into further marginalization, for of course, it is the women, disabled, sexual and ethnic minorities to suffer first when an elite class takes reign.

We can't speak of neoliberalism without speaking of minority struggles because the entire concept is closely tied to European capitalism. Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), inadvertently illustrated this, where he pointed to the relationship of the protestant religion and its economic manifestation, Capitalism (Weber, 1905). It is this ethos which propagated into colonial projects of Europe from the 16th century onward, but more

particularly, northern Europe in the 18th century. This very same ethos is what ties neoliberalism to white-supremacy. Without using that word, Edward Said's seminal work, *Orientalism*, delivered a rigorous and overwhelming breakdown of the mechanisms of white supremacy as it relates to the peoples of the silk road. Said's findings, much like Crenshaw, continue to be used across many activist communities to make meaning of these complex relationships of domination and submission. Simply put, the capitalistic spirit, in the pursuit of the profit motive, demanded its disciples to dehumanize other groups in order to contain them. Economic control and exponential growth were dressed as personal salvation, prioritizing the individual above the communal. We can feel this in the systemic racism, individualization, and productivity expectations we are consumed in.

Neoliberalism is inescapable. The divide between the rich and the poor is increasing. Nations outside the economic and political walls of the western world have become the serving and producing proletariat to the euro-centric bourgeoisie. Environmental decay is rampant. And privatization of universities, public schools, health care, and other state sanctioned institutions is more common place than not. We see neoliberal impacts on theatres where ratings and reviews dominate process, low rehearsal time and high production demands run rampant, and artistic inquiry takes a backseat to the profit motive. And again, neoliberalism appears to be the culprit with our societal addiction to social media, which centers the divine individual in their made-up cyber temple. We make sense of environmental and social decay in light of neoliberalism's ultimate tenant of profit or perish.

It's hard to argue *against* the existence of neoliberalism without subscribing to conservative traditions of academia. Anti-Marxism and anti-communism were common place and institutional in the 60s, however, the shifting of the tide is evident, certainly in Canada. And

while global policies, war strategies, politics and education maintain the neoliberal mechanics of operating, I argue that universities and artistic institutions are attempting to resist it. At the very least, they are attempting to resist it in their rhetoric, if not in their operations.

As a minority and a beneficiary of the intersectional politics which have grown out of a struggle against neoliberalism, I have gravitated and found a lot of solace in this dissection of reality. However, I am not interested in accepting and embracing a world view that is useful only for me. Further, I have lost my understanding when I shut off avenues to other ways of knowing. Although I use this research enterprise to explore the contributions of minority academics and artists, I feel some resistance to the Neo-Marxist analysis of reality. And, perhaps, I am leery of the idea that society is an arrangement of overlapping domination and submission politics. Indeed, I am impacted greatly by domination and submission politics, but I also experience sovereignty, compassion, community, love, spirit, resistance, personal liberation and harmony. Why mustn't these be considerations in our construction of our world view, for after all, the neoliberal lens *is* simply a world view.

I start by setting this landscape and I remind you that this is an artists' research. As opposed to a social scientist or a literary critic, an artist has the opportunity to research beyond the machinations of society or politics and reach into a sublime place. I lay out our contemporary understanding of the neoliberal landscape as the reference to begin the reach into the roots of our humanity within this given context. My hope is that these roots will expose, affirm, or reject our current understanding of our sociocultural relationships. And perhaps it will bring us closer to a way of living that is more spiritually, socially, and intellectually balanced.

Decoloniality through a queer and feminist lens

I suspect that my reach into these roots will unveil a more sublime reality than anything the social or political world might weave together. But to reach this place in my artistic practise, I must be cognizant of the lens which I am working through. This is where I invite a decoloniality through a queer and feminist lens into my artistic challenge.

Decoloniality

Decoloniality differs from decolonialism. Whereas decolonialism is the European term describing their extraction of the colonial efforts from any daughter land, decoloniality is a process by a previously colonized people to strip away the sublime impacts of colonization. Walter D. Mignolo masterfully illustrates this conversation in his paper “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference” (2002). Anibal Quijano also details the complex interplay of colonization and legitimized ways of knowing in “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality” (2007).

I will not go into deep detail regarding the theories surrounding decoloniality, but it is worth briefly outlining. Mignolo and Quijano disrupt conceptions of modernity. Beginning in the Renaissance and extending to today, modernity is the zeitgeist which historically, poetically, and philosophically centers Western civilization, and Western capitalism, as the arbiter of progress (Mignolo, 2002). Mignolo says that “The expansion of Western capitalism implied the expansion of Western epistemology in all its ramifications, from the instrumental reason that went along with capitalism and the industrial revolution, to the theories of the state, to the criticism of both capitalism and the state” (2002). Mignolo highlights the discourse of “There can be no others” which he says “inscribed a conceptualization of knowledge to a geopolitical space (Western Europe) and erased the possibility of even thinking about a conceptualization and distribution of knowledge “emanating” from other local histories (China, India, Islam, etc.)”

Decoloniality is an effort to center other histories and imaginaries; in this case, I am centering the Arab experience as a form of meaning making. This epistemic shift will be the basis which the playwriting process will flower from. The process of achieving this epistemic shift will hopefully be of utility to other groups decentered by Western hegemony.

Queer and Feminist Lens

The euro-centric neoliberalist capitalism that is being resisted in this study can be understood as a patriarchal force. I will speak further about this in the next section. Feminist scholars have illuminated the patriarchal ethos which dominates western imperial culture. Rationality, linearity, reduction, and control are all part of the spirit of our work in Western civilization. Patriarchy goes beyond men having more economic power than women. Patriarchy is a lens which values and enforces masculine ways of being above all else. Much like white supremacy, patriarchy can be uplifted and supported by men, women, and people of all genders. It is a philosophy, tethered to deep biosocial impulses, which germinates into our spiritual, political, and social lives. Bell Hooks defines this complex interlocking web of concepts most succinctly as “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (Hooks, 2004).

To resist patriarchal hegemony, I invite feminine and queer ways of knowing as the lens which I view my playwriting and theatre making. I lean on the works of Augusto Boal, who potently worked in feminine ways of knowing, inverting hierarchal modes of operating (Boal, 1993). This is vastly delegitimate territory, as queer and feminine ways appear infantile and naïve. How do I fold concepts of ecology, wholistic thinking, non-hierarchal organization, and communal creation into playwriting? Of course, theatre and literature are perhaps the best place for this to happen. We need only look at the works of authors like Ursula Le Guin, who vigilantly worked through a feminist lens to combat patriarchy. Theatre is also already doing

this. But the evidence is apparent; it is the very patriarchy we relent against that has subordinated art into an afterthought of human activity. Schools and universities are unapologetically cutting arts funding in the hopes of competing in the neoliberal landscape of education. It is disheartening but not defeating.

Further, I invite a queer and feminist analysis into the Arabization of playwriting in a hope to challenge the patriarchy inherent in the Arab culture which I am centering. Theatre work by Arab artists will be a part of this analysis, but I suspect I will come up against patriarchal discourses that propagate oppressive ethos like those born from the imperial west. This lens is also unavoidable. I am queer, and this will inevitably leave an impression on my understanding of reality.

Strategic Essentialism

While some argue that overarching concepts such as “Arab,” “White,” “feminist,” or “queer” are reductionist in their analysis, I set up these premises to effectively deconstruct their meanings. Dr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “strategic essentialism” is precisely the undertaking in this thesis (Spivak, 1988). The intentional and mindful unification of broad concepts will allow me to navigate an exploration which is in pursuit of unlearning colonial and imperialist essentialist objectification of my ethnocultural lineage. As Edward Said says “...the Orient needed first to be known, then invaded and possessed, then re-created by scholars, soldiers, and judges who disinterred forgotten languages, histories, races, and cultures in order to posit them beyond the modern Oriental’s ken –as the classical Orient that could be used to judge and rule the modern Orient” (Said, 1978). My endeavor is, first, a repossession of the Orient – more specifically, the Arab – which I suspect will lead to a deconstruction and recreation of myself as a full and complex personal subject.

The Playwright as the White Patriarch (And What Could Be)

Given the context laid out above, I posit that the playwright of the Western theatre as the white patriarch. This playwright is found in every playwriting textbook, in many playwriting courses, and certainly, he has been the crafter of the Canadian theatrical cannon. This playwright demands that a full-length play is in three acts. He demands that characters must experience an arc through a journey that takes the audience from beginning, middle, to the climatic end. He fills his process with characters that often look like him, and he models the catharsis after the sexual release of a male orgasm. His psychology is engraved into his socio-political and artistic sensibilities. And because he has dominated for so long, he is convinced that his sensibility is the only sensibility.

The intersectional social movement dares to disrupt his world view. Keep in mind, this is a world view which all of us have deeply inherited, from the skin whitening creams that are popular in eastern Asia, to the excessive plastic surgeries that center European conceptions of beauty (Al-Solaylee, 2016). I recall catching a glimpse of my face in the mirror one day after reading an X-men comic book and thinking about how *not white* I am. None of the characters have ever reflected who I am. And I'm not alone in this. Indeed, we've become so used to the complex and shapeshifting white man who plays our heroes, that there is a deep cognitive dissonance between our own complex experience and what our art reflects back on us. I speak this from a Canadian perspective. If I were in Lebanon, much of media and art would indeed reflect me. *But* they are watching western movies in Lebanon and not the other way around.

My artistic challenge is to understand how the white patriarch has convinced me that writing in his image is the key to legitimacy. Then it is to deconstruct that understanding to replace it with my own ability to legitimize. But I have questions and hesitations. First, I

wonder if I give him too much credit by giving him all copyrights on the heroes journey, the three act play, and other conventions immortalized in western theatre. Didn't these themes exist in Arabian culture long before the colonial projects of the 18th century? Second, I wonder if I am in any position to challenge him when this entire enterprise is done in his language. Can I challenge Euro-centric ways of knowing while I am speaking, thinking, and interacting entirely in English? Finally, if I am sincerely honest with myself, I worry that my entire endeavour is an effort to have the white patriarch give me his artistic and academic stamp of approval. When legitimizing forces like the granting bodies and award councils uphold conceptions of white supremacy, how have I challenged anything when the thing that legitimizes my efforts is the thing I am challenging entirely? And, of course, there is no one white patriarchal playwright. There are many and they appear in many manifestations. However, it is a useful metaphor to make sense of the spirit of what is being resisted. But if it becomes too tight of a container, then let me dispose of it. Replacing one form of control for another is not my objective. Also, how do I invite an Arab way of knowing when I question the authenticity of my own Arab-ness? And last, I feel as if I have been wearing the mask of the white culture I grew up in for so long that I am afraid I will rip off my own face in an attempt at removing the mask.

So what does the Arab playwright look like?

An Arab (And a Western-Arab) Playwright: Memories and Imaginations

My conceptions of an Arab playwright are narrow. Ironically, the first Arab playwright that comes to mind is Khalil Gibran, perhaps the most famous Arab playwright (and poet) in the west. Gibran is most known for his poem, *The Prophet*, but he has indeed written theatre plays. I superficially know several theatre groups working in Lebanon, but by and large, my

understanding of actual, real Arab playwrights is, again, narrow. Even when I turn my gaze to Western-Arab playwrights, I am only familiar with Wajdi Mouwad and Stephen Karam.

These playwrights each understood and grapple with immigration politics and their positionality in western civilization. But it's important to highlight that all of them are men of Christian descent. A lack of exposure to Islamic Arab ways of being is no mistake in a system that privileges the Christian ethos. And this is where I get stuck.

I am neither Christian nor Muslim, but Druze. The Druze people are an ethno-religious group which marry elements of Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, and Hinduism. It is predominantly found amongst the Levantine Arabs of Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. Categorically, it is an offshoot of the Shiite Muslim branch. But in practise, the connection to the Islamic faith is contentious. The socio-history of Druze people is not very important here. What's more important is that the religion means very little to me. Indeed, I am more informed and more knowledgeable about Christian spirituality than Druze spirituality. This is arguably a result of having grown up in a Christian rural town in Southern Alberta, where my parents were investing all of their energy into the immigration project and I was severed from my Druze community at large. Layer in a post-9/11 rejection of my Arab-ness, you can imagine that the few threads holding me to my religious community became frayed and withered. In all dimensions, it was imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy that created these conditions. But the stickiness is that sometimes *I don't really care*. An English speaking, euro-centric orientation allows me to navigate the world in likely similar ways as an Arab epistemology – perhaps even in more economically potent ways. Sometimes, I question: would I even miss my Arab-ness if I didn't know I was an Arab?

But other times, I *do* really care. And this discordance is what makes this artistic challenge so challenging. In the midst of all this, I posit that the necessity to understand my Arab identity is not to live in some essentialist Arab way, but rather, to reinvent and have sovereignty over my Arab-ness. If an Arab body does *something*, is that not an Arab way of being? Where does my agency begin and my colonizers impression end? If I write, much like Stephen Karam, a play about a suburban family, like his play *The Humans*, is it by default a Western-Arab play? Must I decorate my work with Arabian ornamentation like Khalil Gibran? Wajdi Mouwad does a compelling job of simultaneously hiding his identity while evocatively addressing its impact. If my artistic sensibilities are made up of a range of Western impressions ranging from *Harry Potter* to *Angels in America* to films like *Arrival*, could I potentially wind up tokenizing my own ethnic heritage in an attempt to understand it? At the root of all this is a core question: what does it even mean to be Arab?

Beyond the limited theatrical artists that inform this study, I invite my relationships with the queer and feminist Arab world. Queer Lebanese rock band *Mashrou' Leila* has stirred a conversation in the Middle East about LGBTQ representation and rights. Feminist Joumana Haddad has written poetry and non-fiction books which address that toxic masculinity and the sectarian religiosity problem which is magnified in Lebanon but manifest in the entire Middle East and North Africa. Rabih Alameddine, author of the novel *Koolaid's*, directly tackles issues of HIV/AIDS amongst the gay community and the civil war in Lebanon. These are the Arabs that move, speak, perform culture, and orient themselves in the world like me. Of course, I acknowledge that much of this centers Lebanon. It is irresponsible to talk about an Arab-ness as some monolithic identity and I acknowledge that my Lebanese lens will inevitably be a part of this conversation.

And I end this section with a nebulous sense of who the Arab playwright is, I recognize that this is a central factor which my artistic challenge hinges on. As such, I have brought together a team of Arab artists in Toronto who will be a part of the creative process. I spent much of the first year investigating the Arab playwright in solitude. But, as I learned from my queer communities, it is in community where identity is best understood. And I hope to set up the circumstances for this community through critical and hopeful dramaturgy.

Critical and Hopeful Dramaturgy

“Critical thinking without hope is cynicism. Hope without critical thinking is naïveté” (Popova, 2018).

If the above sections illustrate the problem, here I will attempt to address the solution. As previously mentioned, I brought together a team of Arab artists to continue the development of my thesis play. The identity of these artists ranges from a non-Arab speaking, half-Serbian, half-Iraqi man to a Queer Muslim Lebanese woman to a Non-religious Syrian refugee theatre artist. It is exciting and daunting to bring this team together.

In the context of this study, where unearthing an Arab way of playwriting is the task, it is difficult to conjecture what “critical and hopeful dramaturgy” looks like. I offer Popova’s insight as a starting point. I must look at my understanding of Arab-ness with a critical lens and with a hopeful lens. My Arab-ness is patriarchal and wholistic, it is oppressive and revolutionary, it is regressive and innovative. It is contradictions. I situate my Arab-ness in relation to my family, where there is a foundation of unspoken love and an abundance of hardened speech. Arab-ness is community and honor. It is often saying what you don’t mean to maintain social cohesion. It is integrity in uplifting your mother and father’s name. These are only some of the pieces which make up my scattered understanding.

As I apply this to playwriting, I consider the following. Where Euro-centric playwriting separate the writer from the director and the actors, I wonder if a communal format will be fruitful in Arabizing the process. What happens if the individualistic process of sitting at your laptop is transformed to a community dialogue which generates the explorations of the play? Further, does de-centering whiteness mean folding in the Arabic language and Arabic histories? How do I treat oppressions that come from the Arab way of knowing? Is it less Arab to re-orient our understanding around deeply ingrained systems of oppression? Or is it more Arab to re-invent our understanding of these systems? Most importantly, I want to set up the circumstances for the Arab imaginary to manifest. My hope is that the playwriting process will organically flower from the exchange of Arab artists. And if the process sounds a lot like theatre for social change or popular theatre techniques, then perhaps it is. Often, popular theatre is a process of facilitation which aims to reflect back the needs of the community being worked with. The ultimate hope in tackling this artistic challenge is indeed inviting the Arab bodies to work together. It is the provocation “how does intergenerational memory and trauma sit in our bodies, hearts, and minds?” that we will attempt to my artistic challenge.

PERFORMANCE RESEARCH

I began the creation of this play in a nebulous place. Following studio and academic explorations motivated by self directed and course driven studies, I slowly arrived at the artistic exploration: “how does intergenerational memory and trauma sit in our bodies, hearts, and minds?” My research is concerned with this provocation. Below, I will detail how the research flowered, sometimes sequentially, sometimes non-linearly, into the thesis performance draft of “The Green Line.” Then, I outline the technical and specific elements of producing the play.

The Play and the Process

“The Green Line” follows the simultaneous stories of two women falling in love in the Lebanese Civil War and two men meeting for the first time in the hidden recesses of the Beirut queer night life. The stories weave complex lineages together as I attempted a dramaturgical structure reflective of how intergenerational memory manifested in my personal studio explorations. Ultimately, the story took on a conventional, canonical style of storytelling and a team of Arab performers were hired in conventional roles of performers. This deviation from my originally set up artistic challenge will be examined in the discussion section of the thesis in some detail.

The play was almost entirely written in solitude. During and after completing my first year of courses, studio, and academic explorations, I set consistent writing days which formed the foundations of the play. By December 2018, I had a very rough preliminary draft. This draft was dramaturged during the creation course and further expanded and revised. A second draft was formed by the end of my first year.

During the spring and summer semester, I turned my attention to revising and producing another script. Simultaneously, I visited Lebanon, undertaking an embodied experiential

research relating to “The Green Line.” When I began the Fall of 2018, I undertook an external playwriting course with Paula Wing, at the Tarragon Theatre. The course allowed me to develop the play in a vastly new direction while learning the mechanics of playwriting as embraced and understood in a conventional tradition. I am not overlooking the clear contention between this course and my endeavour to Arabize the playwriting process, however, the discussion section of the thesis will discuss this point also.

After arduous rewrites, a third, and vastly different draft of “The Green Line,” was written. The project was selected for the Rhubarb Festival at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre and I was awarded a Canada Council for the Arts grant to host a dramaturgy workshop with a team of Arab performers and an Arab dramaturg in preparation for the festival. Out of this workshop, hosted in January 2019, I developed the fourth draft of “The Green Line.” This draft, with minor revisions, will be the basis of the Rhubarb Festival. The thesis performance will include the 25 minutes performed at the Rhubarb Festival in addition to a scripted staging of the rest of the play.

Inspirations

Much like my artist’s challenge, which is a desire to understand the Arab ways of knowing, my content research was inspired by desire to look at Arab ways of *being*. I entered the work with a mind frame that encouraged an intense leaning into identity politics and a critical inquiry into systems of oppression. This positionality informs my research most prevalently. My initial explorations were provoked by a deep resistance to white supremacy and white normative consciousness. But the critical eye, while vital to anti-oppressive work, at times worked against the creative process. Frustration and anger are important pieces of my artistic ethos, certainly in so far as its organically evolved, but there is a lot more. I began tapping into this “more,” in the process of developing “The Green Line.”

I recall moving through the studio under the guidance of an activity being led by a professor. As I move from space to space, I imagine landing on different islands around the world. I imagine a family of Syrian refugees, where the parents and adult children are each accepted into different countries. I think of Dina Nayeri, the ungrateful refugee (Nayeri, 2017). A statement comes to me, “we keep crying out to the sky hoping it would reach you.” I think of my own family. I think of the geographical space between us and the implications of that for our future. Then I see my face in the mirror against the studio wall. And, so abruptly, I thought “wow, I look so much like my dad.”

This moment was pivotal in the foundational affective underlying of “The Green Line.” The performance content generated in the first semester was floating without direction, but this moment of “wow, I look so much like my dad” has guided the creative process. Qualities of displacement and diaspora occupied much of my personal explorations in the early days, but it was this linking to my father which pulled from me a sense of direction. Imagining my father in the Lebanese Civil War was not new, but, suddenly, in the context of creating this play, it was sharp.

So my internal and affective studio research expanded outward and I began to ask my parents about the war. Not unexpectedly, my mother didn’t offer vivid details. I remember one such moment when I was asking her of the war. She said ‘it was the best of times, we were all really close together.’ Further, she shared a story of militia groups moving into her mountain town, forcing her and her family to quickly pack their belongings in their father’s vehicle and escape down to West Beirut. She laughs as she remembers her youngest sibling fussing about leaving. But beyond this story, any time I would ask her, she would say that there is nothing worth noting. It was all so normal and it came and went without much notice. She recalls the

people who lost parents or children with a heavy heart, but she says her and her family were lucky to not have any of that experience.

My father, on the other hand, had story after story of his youth spent in the civil war. What a dramatically different experience. My father has always been a storyteller in our home, so it was not unexpected that he would have these offerings. And the creation of the play brought us together in a very familiar but focused way. Stories of standing face to face with Israeli tanks, moving through the green line to help various individuals escape their respective divide in Beirut, and being in your 20s during a time of unrest were unearthed. Some I had heard before, others that were new to me. It's not important to go into detail regarding the stories, but rather, to illustrate the affective landscape that formed the narratives which flowered in the play.

The third person who impressed a lot of details surrounding the war was Amena Shehab. Shehab is a performer and theatre artist who is acting as a dramaturg on "The Green Line." Shehab escaped the Syrian Civil War and has been living in Canada since. Her analysis of the Lebanese Civil War comes from a deep lived experience (of both the Lebanese and Syrian Civil Wars), and a strong and studied political understanding of the landscape as she worked as a journalist in Qatar with the Al Jazeera News Network.

Amena's reflections and incisive dramaturgical work nourished the characters of Mona and Yara. She shared stories and anecdotes of herself, her immediate, and extended family, which became part of the consciousness of the play. The vital difference between my conversations with Amena and the conversations with my parents is that they didn't know this play had queer content. I simply couldn't tell them. The long term impact of this dance of secrecy has deflating and depressing health outcomes. So to work with Amena, an older Arab woman who comes from a similar background as my parents, has been nothing short of healing.

Her embrace of the wisdom I might hold in understanding queerness was amalgamated by her thorough embodiment and way of knowing as an Arab person displaced in Canada. This kind of revelation, which is the ethos of writing such a work, is where I find the strength and healing capacity of voicing marginalized experiences.

Vital Queer Experiences

The conversations with the three pivotal people named above felt other worldly. I am a suburban and rural kid who grew up with *Harry Potter* and Saturday morning cartoons. At times, I felt appropriative of my own history. At other times, I listened to the three of them graciously share integral parts of their lives and I felt inextricably bound to each of their stories. I think of Lebanese writer and feminist, Joumana Haddad, who speaks of “our anxious mothers and our angry fathers” and I think how that legacy has followed me to the prairies of Alberta (Haddad, 2012).

As with any creation process, the place where the creator imposes their will is blurred with where the creation must speak its own story. “The Green Line” was not an intuitive creation process. It required a lot of external and academic research. But the most intuitive element was the addition of Rami and Zidan. The two queer men meeting in a queer nightclub in Beirut is certainly an intentional stamp that I placed in the piece. I look at this relationship as my flag, stating that I am a part of this land, this city, and these people. The experiences of Rami, in particular, as quite reflective of my own in Beirut. And I needed that to be known throughout the storytelling. Once I asked my mother “was there any queer people in your town when you were younger?” And she simply said “no, we never heard of them.” Perhaps it was a necessity to impose myself in these stories by adding the queerness. Perhaps it was my challenge to patriarchy and, by extension, the homophobia implicit in it, that is evident in Arab culture?

As mentioned above, Amena was the only one privy to the full scope of the play. My parents knew fragments. My mother understood that it was about two women who fell in love in the Lebanese Civil War, but we did not divulge further. My father only knew that it was about the civil war. Similarly, each of these people know just as much about my own sexual and romantic orientation. Again, the dance of secrecy is delicate and tiresome, but necessary. Moving through these stories is a form of honor and love that I extend to my parents. And it is also a form of resistance, to place myself and those like me, in our own histories. After all, it is not unusual for queer folks to find themselves displaced from history.

I take my courage from my queer communities in Canada. I also take my courage from *Masrou'* *Leila*, a Lebanese queer rock band. I take my courage from *Koolaid*s by Rabih Alameddine. I take my courage from gay Syrian-Canadian novelist, Admad Daddy Ramadan. I take my courage from the people who dare to kiss on the streets of Beirut. I take my courage from the organizers of the first pride parade in the middle east, Proud Lebanon. I take my courage from my younger self, who I so wished had someone like me telling him that you can be queer and fulfilled, that you are a part of this story and a part of this history.

Perhaps I am reconciling the division I feel from my family by creating a world where these contradictions exist in cohesion. The vital queerness of Yara, Mona, Rami and Zidan cannot be understated as a contradictory stamp of embrace and resistance. And each of these characters introduce the different complex elements of that stamp – some intentional, some subconscious, but all *vital*.

DISCUSSION

If the goal of my thesis was to investigate an Arabization of the playwriting process through an exploration of intergenerational memory, then in many ways I have failed. Yet, in others, there are formidable successes. Both circumstances offer illuminating discoveries. Throughout this section, I will look at the internal and external resistance that I faced in my endeavor to discover an Arabization of playwriting. In retrospective analysis, I can see that perhaps I was not the one to seek out this process, and perhaps the original question ought to be reframed entirely.

A Colonized Imagination

Quijano states regarding the relationship between imperial colonizer and colonized that “This relationship consists, in the first place, of a colonization of the imagination of the dominated; that is, it acts in the interior of that imagination, in a sense, it is a part of it” (Quijano, 2007). The latent internalized racism rears itself when confronted so directly under the circumstances of such a project. And activating my imagination, as I must for the artistic journey I’ve undertaken, centers and amplifies the “colonization of the imagination” that Quijano describes above. So, it is no surprise that my process of the Arabization of playwriting led me to read books by white playwrights, authors, and artists and at its most deviant: Western Arab authors and artists. Why not read Arab literature directly? Simply answered; I can’t read Arabic. It is no surprise that in the confines of a Western colonial institution like York University, and in the Canadian theatre landscape, and in Canada as a nation state of the global imperialist project, that my imagination is thoroughly and comprehensively colonized by the colonizer. Comments in my end of term discussions such as “you set out to find an Arabization of playwriting, but you wrote a well-made classically structured play” sit with me

uncomfortably. What my professors inadvertently illuminate is a deeply entrenched sense of internal racism. Not unlike the internalized homophobia that many sexually diverse people experience, reflecting and mimicking the dominant culture is a disposition of safety and protection. However, it is in the structural and cultural tapestry of the LGBTQ+ community which I find normativity in my queerness. Similarly, I will not find normativity in my Arabness (or decolonialness) in a colonial institution. So perhaps the entire enterprise was doomed to fail from the onset. Or perhaps someone braver than I am ought to take it on.

An Unspecified Arab City

One specific way this internalized racism manifested, beside the structure of the play, is in the non-specificity of the Arab city which the play takes place. In early workshops, the cast indicated that it was a disservice that the play doesn't take place in Beirut. They further emphasized that the play *does* take place in Beirut because of the specificity of the experience in it, but the only thing that I result in doing by placing the play in a non-descript Arab city, is masking the experience. I reflect on this masking as a desire to submit and cater to the white gaze. I have been saying through this process that I write culturally specific experiences that land in a Canadian context. However, a Canadian context has indeed been meaning a white euro-centric, specifically Anglo-Saxon, Christian, Canadian context. It is important to name this. But from this point of inquiry, I will move forward with placing the play in Beirut. In a dramaturgical session with Amena Shehab, she spoke of Maxime Gorky introducing the U.S. to cabbage soup in Russia and Gabriel Marquez introducing the Spanish/Colombian culture to literary cannon. She asked me: why are we embarrassed to specifically introduce Beirut to this same cannon? On the one hand, I feel that placing the play in Beirut comes with the risk of relegating the work to "multicultural theatre" and away from places of legitimizing literary merit.

But on the other hand, I am emboldened by the words of my community through this process to place in in Beirut. The specificity is authentic to my experience, and that's it. I am not trying to do any more than that. It is authentic to what I am trying to write. And the way that is internalized and taken up by the white gaze ought to be, indeed, none of my business. Further, who and what determines literary merit and legitimacy ought to be challenged from the top down. As an artist, I can only and will continue to create work that is authentic to my experience.

Canadianized or Colonized Arab

One magnificently important personal discovery I made throughout this process is to conceptualize my identity as a Canadianized Arab. As mentioned above, the “Colonization of imagination” is alive and well in my work – allow this English language thesis to be proof of that. However, there is something deeply unsettling about this experience. Indeed, I speak English more fluidly than Arabic. I navigate the world with a political and cultural understanding that is entirely oriented by my Canadian upbringing. In a journal reflection, I wrote the following short poem:

*“I am in love with my colonizer. I love the way
your English flowers from my tongue and your
manicured lawns call me home. I love that
your cathedrals and spires inspire my horizon,
the future, always building, growing, until we
reach stars, and even more when we're bored
of those. You have made here nor there a
place for me.”*

I equate the term “Canadianized Arab” with “Arabized Jew” or “Arabized Armenian.” Jewish or Armenian groups which were entrenched in Arab and Muslim imperialist cultures of the 10th century found their identities so amalgamated, mutated, in contention and harmony, with the dominant culture. Thus, Arabized Jews and Arabized Armenians, who continue to express identity in this way today, exist. I draw on this description to conceptualize the idea of a Canadianized Arab. Indeed, I do not want to unwind myself from the “Canadianized” of my “Canadianized Arab” identity. And I think that is very manifest in this play. The challenges which Rami, namely, faces, are like mine. However, the structure, resistances, and experiences of the entire play, especially and no less, the queerness of the play, are so aggressively “Canadianized” that it cannot be separated from who I am. I create theatre as a Canadianized Arab because that is what I know and that is who I am. If this illuminates anything in the broader context of these conversations, it is that identities are transient and ever changing. A colonization of imagination can be reframed to achieve sovereignty and dignity (which, at the bottom line, is what this is all about) into the revelation of a Canadianized Arab. There is power in naming and claiming that. The learning lies in the fact that Arab identity is transient. As a matter of fact, I reinstate that all our identities are transient. Identity politics stop their utility when they prohibit expression. And the enforcement of identity, through shame and prejudice, from imperialists or their resisters, is stunting to identity shaping and reshaping.

So where does that leave us?

I must ask, it is my duty to reclaim a non-Canadianized Arab identity in the service of combatting white supremacy? I’m not so sure. And I must leave this question open for future inquiries. But after completing this project, the pursuit in artistic representation and expression is a fundamental desire for freedom, sovereignty, and dignity. First, freedom from the orientalist

conceptualizations that lock Arabs into greedy, tyrannical billionaires or salacious terrorists. Second, the sovereignty to illustrate and determine our stories authentically (in my case with queerness, drag queens, war, and peace). And third, the dignity to be understood as whole human beings who are capable of expression, emotion, and elasticity in character. Writing “The Green Line,” even within the context of an imperialist language, in an imperialist institution, and at times, to the service of a white gaze, I argue, has offered me the expression and esteem that I desire when combatting the impacts of white-supremacy. In short, take my language, take my land, take my culture and traditions and yet: I will conquer and harness yours to show you my soul nonetheless.

But, I observe the above with a caveat. I have doubly failed when I have replaced one supremacy for another. Resistance to a colonized state of mind may beget a colonial state of mind. I mimic the colonizer in an effort for freedom, sovereignty, and dignity, but I must be careful to not become an agent of reproduction of the imperialist power I resist. So perhaps, the argument to discover a non-Canadianized Arab identity holds much water. At the end of this process, I must re-center a commitment to non-imperialist ways of artistic production. I must resist the capitalistic myth of exponential growth and the profit motive above all. And I must remind myself that all my artistic worth is only found in the soils of the expressions of love. Lebanese-American author, Khalil Gibran reminds me that “Work is love made visible” (Gibran, 2016).

Conclusion

I keep thinking of my colleague, Mallory Fisher’s question, “are you discovering an Arab way of knowing or a Makram way of knowing?” The more specific I became with understanding my process as an artist and myself as an Arab, I had an important realization. I

am discovering a Makram way of knowing, which is a Canadianized Arab way of knowing, which is, in some way, an Arab way of knowing. I think of what I imagined an Arab way of knowing to be – collective, familial, proud, poetic, resistant, resilient. Maybe, I even thought of an Arab way of knowing as sometimes old, otherworldly, magical, whimsical – even though that comes with all kinds of orientalist implications. But if the task is to understand an Arab way of knowing in an effort of freedom, sovereignty, and dignity, then perhaps the question was wrong to begin with. Rather than an Arab way of knowing, some grand political gesture, why would it be wrong to discover a Makram way of knowing? Implicit in that is inevitably some Arab way of knowing, and some queer way of knowing, and some little-brother way of knowing, and some masculine way of knowing, and some gay way of knowing, and all the parts that make Makram: Makram. And as selfish as that sounds, I lean on the words of my professor Michele Fleiger who told me *that only in the deeply personal can we ever find the universal*.

WORKS CITED

- Al-Solaylee, Kamal. *Brown: What Being Brown in the World Today Means*. HarperCollins, 2017.
- Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Theatre Communications Group, 1993
- Crenshaw, Kimberle, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol 8, no. 1, 1989.
- Gallagher, K. and Rodricks, D., "Hope despite hopelessness: Race, gender, and the pedagogies of drama/applied theatre as a relational ethic in neoliberal times," *Youth Theatre Journal*, vol 31, no. 2, pp. 114-128, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08929092.2017.1870625>, 2017
- Gibran, Kahlil. *The Prophet*. VIVI Books, 2016.
- Elle. "Femininity, Tarot, the Yin and Yang." *White Owl Mystic*, 22 July 2018, whiteowlmystic.com/2017/01/23/femininity-tarot-the-yin-and-yang/.
- Haddad, Joumana. *Superman Is an Arab on God, Marriage, Macho Men and Other Disastrous Inventions*. Westbourne, 2012.
- Hooks, Bell. "Understanding Patriarchy." <http://Imaginenoborders.org/Pdf/Zines/UnderstandingPatriarchy.pdf>.
- Mignolo, W. D. "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 101, no. 1, 2002, pp. 57–96., doi:10.1215/00382876-101-1-57.
- Nayeri, Dina. "The Ungrateful Refugee: 'We Have No Debt to Repay'." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 4 Apr. 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/04/dina-nayeri-ungrateful-refugee.
- Popova, Maria. "Hope, Cynicism, and the Stories We Tell Ourselves." *Brain Pickings*, 12 May 2018, www.brainpickings.org/2015/02/09/hope-cynicism/.
- Quijano, Anibal, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies*, Vol 21, No. 2-3, pp. 168-178, doi: 10.1080/09502380601164353, 2007
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, 1994.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the subaltern speak?* Basingstoke: Macmillan.

APPENDIX A: PRODUCTION OF THE PLAY

Creation and Production Time Line

Year 1

Term 1: September 2017 – December 2017

- Experiment in Mask, Film, Movement, Song, Dance, Puppet, etc.
- Create a “creative compendium” of original work, source material, inspiration, and journal reflections.
- Explore and reflect on readings of orientalism, gender and sexuality, existentialism, naturalism, etc. (create reading list.)
- During winter break: write rough draft of play.

Term 2: January 2018 – April 2018

- Verbal thesis pitch.
- Dramaturg and develop rough draft of play through creation course.
- Continue exploring different forms and styles.
- Continue academic and studio research for play creation.

Term 3: May 2018 – August 2018

- Expand and explore created thesis piece from Term 1 and Term 2.
- Embodied and experiential research visit to Beirut.

Year 2

Term 1: September 2018 – December 2018

- Expand, explore, and thoroughly develop academic and artist work on thesis.
- Attend playwriting course at Tarragon Theatre with Paula Wing.
- Substantially revise and develop “The Green Line.”
- During winter break: Develop third draft of “The Green Line”
- Audition to cast Rhubarb Festival and York University Thesis Showing.

Term 2: January 2019 – April 2019

- Revise and develop “The Green Line” through dramaturgical workshop with cast and dramaturg.
- Rehearsals in preparation for Rhubarb Festival and York University Thesis Showing (detailed rehearsal schedule attached in appendix).
- Produce “The Green Line” at the Rhubarb Festival.
- Produce “The Green Line” Thesis Showing at York University.
- Produce “The Green Line” at Yes!fest.
- Complete artistic administrative package for “The Green Line” (pitch, marketing, media, etc.)
- Complete and finalize written thesis.

Casting

As outlined in the schedule above, casting auditions were hosted in December 2018.

There was an intentional effort to seek out culturally specific performers, which came with the challenging of outreach to communities of Arab artists that may find themselves in the work.

Casting took on a conventional form of a panel of auditioners to whom performers read cold readings of the play to. Auditions were hosted at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre's Cabaret Space on December 18, 2018. The audition notice is attached in the appendix.

List of Collaborators

Performers:

Laith Al-Kinani – Naseeb/Rami

Laith Al-Kinani is a performer and playwright based in Toronto. He is pursuing a BFA in

Performance Acting at Ryerson University, and also developing a new play with the Paprika

Festival. His embodied experiences as an Iraqi-Canadian fuel his artistry; his storytelling

explores the interplay of language, movement, ideas, and where they all sit in our mental

geographies. In his free time, he spends time with his loved ones, reading, writing, or listening to

Sade.

Sukaina Ibraheem - Yara

Sukaina is a graduate of the Devised Theatre Program at York University. In 2016, she

assistant directed Sad Ibsen Theatre's debut production *Exiles* by James Joyce. She also sat on

the advisory board for Paprika Festival. She performed the lead role, Ghomeshi, in her

most recent devised theatre work *Mens Rea* (2017), and was Producing Assistant for Theatre

Gargantua's *Reflector*. Most recently, she developed *Metanoia* with her collective company

Palimpsest Theatre for York University's 2018 Devised Theatre Festival.

Rayan Jamal - Mona

Rayan is a self-described mosaic person made of writing, design, poetry, and art. Her passions are diverse, but drive is one: to leave wherever she arrives a better place. She majored in graphic design in her undergrad, while never missing a chance to attend writing workshops, journalistic seminars, or lectures. She is a freelance designer, writer, graduate student in Media Production at Ryerson University, and founder of The Poetry Passport, a poetry collective in Saudi Arabia.

Yousef Kadoura – Fifi/Zidan

Yousef Kadoura is an actor and writer as well as a graduate of the Acting program at the National Theatre School of Canada. Born in the USA, and raised in Ottawa Ontario, he produces and hosts *Walking the Space*, a podcast series exploring disability in the arts, and is currently the Tangled Art + Disability curator in residence.

Other:

Amena Shehab - Dramaturg

Amena is a performer, writer, and theatre artist originally from Syria. She's been active in theatre in Canada since 2014. She studied at the High Institute of Theatre in Damascus and worked with Al Jazeera Children's Channel and local theatre companies in Syria and Qatar. Amena was born in Syria and has begun a new life in Canada with her family, creating art that inspires meaningful cultural conversations.

Makram Ayache – Playwright/Director

Makram Ayache is a playwright, performer, educator and activist based in Tkaronto. His theatre work is currently concerned with amplifying historically marginalized voices. As a playwright, he creates culturally specific work that speaks in a Canadian context. His play, "Harun" was developed at the Banff Center's Playwrights' Lab in 2018 and was nominated for Best New Play

(non-professional) by Broadway World Regional Awards. He will graduate with an MFA in theatre performance creation in April 2019.

Funding Overview

Secured Grants and Artist Compensation

\$5100 – Canada Council for the Arts Development Grant for Rhubarb Festival

\$1700 – Rhubarb Festival Artist Compensation

\$6800 – Total Funds from Grants and Artist Compensation

Secured Expenses

\$1022.85 – Dramaturg Artist Fee

\$962.86 x 5 – Performer/Director Artist Fee

\$720.00 – Reader Artist Fee

\$242.86 – Stage Manager Artist Fee

\$6800.00 – Total Expenses

Unsecured Revenue

~\$200.00 – Indiegogo Online Funding Campaign

~unknown – Ticket Sales from Yes!fest.

Unsecured Expenses

\$50 – Props and costume

\$150 – Set

In Kind

Projector and Scrims/Screens – Jason Hildebrand

Audition Notice

AUDITION NOTICE – The Green Line

Date: December 17-18, 2018

Time: TBD

Location: TBD

Contact: Please email email@email.com with a headshot and resume to book an audition.

The Green Line is a new stage play by Makram Ayache which will have a development showing at the 40th Rhubarb Festival and York University in February 2019.

Synopsis:

The Green Line follows four characters in an unnamed Middle Eastern Arab city. Two women are falling in love under the tumult of war and two men are meeting for the first time in the hidden recesses of the queer nightlife scene. The stories braid and weave past and present, histories and imaginaries. At its heart, it is a contemplation of the way cultural memories are inherited or erased.

Roles*:

Mona – 20 something year old Arab woman, engineering student. Headstrong, intelligent, sharp, and hot tempered.

Yara – 20 something year old Arab woman, engineering student. Airy, sarcastic, light spirited, and playful.

Rami – Dual role. 1st character is a 20 something year old Arab man, grew up in Canada, never been to the Middle East before, shy, uncertain, and excitable. 2nd character is a 20 something year old Arab man, grew up in the Middle East, loving, effeminate, cautious, and increasingly unravelling from the war.

Zidan – 20 something year old Arab man, grew up in the Middle East. Tall, handsome, bearded man with a “no-fu*ks-given” attitude. Spends his weekends in his alter ego drag persona, Fifi, who is a phoenix like bearded woman.

*Performers do not have to necessarily be Arab although some roles require some Arabic speaking. As the play is culturally specific, understanding of Arab identity and culture is preferred. Please submit application anyway if you’re interested but unsure if you’re right for the role.

Performance Dates:

Rhubarb Festival – February 20-23, 2019

York University Showing – February 28, March 1, 2019

Rehearsal Dates:

January: Development Dramaturgy workshop – January 5-7, 2019

January – February: Weekly rehearsals for a total of ~50 hours.

February: Rhubarb Show.

Honorarium Payment:

There is an honorarium offered with these roles. This will be discussed further via email or during the audition.

Future Considerations:

In April, 2019, YESfest, a microfestival, will host “The Green Line” in full at the Incubator Space at the Theatre Center.

Detailed Rehearsal Schedule

THE GREEN LINE DETAILED REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

JANUARY

Thursday Jan 24

Time: 6pm-9pm

Location: York University, Atkinson 102e

Performers Called: D, S

Scenes Worked: Prologue, Scene 2

Tasks: Character work, unit breaks, objectives, tactics

Friday Jan 25

Time: 7pm-10pm

Location: Ryerson University, School of Performance, Room TBD

Performers Called: D, S, L

Scenes Worked: Scene 1, Scene 5, Scene 6

Tasks: Character work, unit breaks, objectives, tactics

Wednesday Jan 30

Time: 6pm-9pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: L, Y

Scenes Worked: Scene 3

Tasks: Character work, unit breaks, objectives, tactics, offers on feet and in space

Thursday Jan 31

Time: 2pm-6pm

Location: Buddies in Bad Times, Chamber Space

Performers Called: S, D

Scenes: Prologue, Scene 2, Scene 6

Tasks: Explore space, playing and offering, character work

FEBRUARY

Friday Feb 1

Time: 7pm-10pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: ALL CALL

Scenes: Build preliminary skeleton

Tasks: Blocking, redirects, shaping

Saturday Feb 2

Time: 6pm-9pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: L, Y, D

Scenes: Scene 1, Scene 3, Scene 5

Tasks: Color and detail blocking, deepen character work, offering redirects and shaping, projection playing

Wednesday Feb 6

Time: 6pm-9pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: L, Y

Scenes: Scene 1, Scene 3

Tasks: Detail work, projection playing

Thursday Feb 7

Time: 6pm-9pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: S, D

Scenes: Prologue, Scene 2, Scene 6

Tasks: Detail work, color scenes, projection playing

Friday Feb 8

Time: 7pm-10pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: ALL CALL

Scenes: Build detailed sketch of play

Tasks: Solidify blocking offers, sharper blocking, sound design playing

Sunday Feb 10

Time: 10am-2pm

Location: Buddies in Bad Times, Chamber Space

Performers Called: ALL CALL

Scenes: Stumble Through

Tasks: Time production, perform with full sound and projection stumble through.

Wednesday Feb 13

Time: 6pm-9pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: L, Y

Scenes: Scene 1, Scene 3

Tasks: Final revisions, final sharpening, final deepening

Thursday Feb 14

Time: 6pm-9pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: D, S

Scenes: Prologue, Scene 2, Scene 6

Tasks: Final revisions, final sharpening, final deepening

Friday February 15

Time: 7pm-11pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: ALL CALL

Scenes: Full Dress Rehearsal

Tasks: Full run of play with sound, costume, projection. Mapping and marking lights. Final redirects.

Saturday Feb 16

Time: 5pm-9pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: ALL CALL

Scenes: Second dress rehearsal

Tasks: One full run with costumes, sound, and projection, adding final details and clarifying. Clarifying lighting plan. Read through of entire play with redirects and preparation for Sunday night reading.

Sunday Feb 17

Time: 7:30pm

Location: University of Toronto, Drama Center

Performers Called: ALL CALL

Scenes: Full reading of play

Tasks: Full scripted reading of play for the Festival of Original Theatre Conference at the University of Toronto.

Monday Feb 18

Time: 5pm-10pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: ALL CALL

Scenes: 2 Full Runs

Tasks: 2 full dress runs, finalizing lighting plan, finalizing for opening.

Wednesday Feb 20 - Saturday Feb 23, 8:30, Rhubarb Festival Performance.

Tuesday Feb 26

Time: 6pm-10pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: ALL CALL

Scenes: Full reading rehearsal

Tasks: Full reading with redirects in preparation for showing.

Wednesday Feb 27

Time: 6pm-10pm

Location: TBD

Performers Called: ALL CALL

Scenes: Full reading rehearsal

Tasks: Full reading with redirects in preparation for showing.

Thursday Feb 28, York Thesis Showing Matinee.

MARCH

Friday Mar 1, York Thesis Showing Evening.

Saturday Mar 2, Show Post-Mortem

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRIES

Friday, October 19, 2018

I had a realization today.

I've been wondering: if someone asked me to never be gay again, I would probably feel that as a life half lived and maybe not even worth it. But if someone told me to never speak Arabic, I would kind of get over it.

This mental experiment has made me feel that my sexuality is closer to my spine than my ethnic identity.

But then I realized something profound. If someone asked me to never speak English again, to learn Mandarin or Hindi, to leave Canada and the prairies, to never watch a Canadian theatre or Hollywood film again, and to live in homes that are vastly different than the ones I grew up in, or to celebrate the holidays of a culture that is not built on Christmas, Easter, the September school year, the seasons of Canada, to never express my Canadianness ever again, that would be a life half half half lived. It has already been so hard moving to Toronto because suddenly I needed to re-understand myself, my politics, my expression in a new society - and this society is still a slit of the one I know and am made up of. Imagine relearning yourself in a new concept entirely - like if you asked me to live in Mongolia forever. What conceptions of queer exist there? Can I exist there? How can I exist there?

So what does this mean? That my ethnicity is Canadian? And Canadian is a global geopolitical national identity that meets on Turtle island? Did colonization Work? Am I assimilated? Can I be Canadian and not contribute to the death and orientalism and war of the peoples of my ancestry? Is Lebanon just a summer hot spot? Do I love my Lebaneseness or do I love my parents? Can I be a little bit Lebanese and a lot Canadian? If I am Canadian, if my identity, my heart, my language, my politics, my secularism, my faiths, my traditions, customs, and cycle of seasons exists and is made up of a contemporary Canada, then does that mean I have a responsibility to stop colonial violence against indigenous people here? Yes, absolutely.

Am I Canadian in lived experience and Lebanese in inherited experience? Yes absolutely. Do they coexist or conflict? Do they do both? Probably? But that's not satisfying. Can I reimagine Canadian and reimagine Lebanese to be me?

What do I want in life? What do I value?

I love Toronto, I love Edmonton, I love Vancouver, I love Beirut, I might be able to love LA or New York. I might be able to love Calgary. I probably won't really love Dubai or Jordan (which is a country but a city). I definitely won't love Abr Chamoun and I MOST definitely won't love Kfarheem. I probably won't love living in Oyen forever anymore.

I love writing, in English, and reading in English. I love English works, I love reading novels and stories by English speaking authors of all experiences. I love Hollywood films. I love superhero lore. I actually don't like Arabic tv shows. Or the really popular Turkish tv shows. I do like some

Lebanese movies. I love queer Lebanese novels in English, some of them. One of them. I also really like queer Lebanese culture. I love the nightlife and the style. But I think I like the mixed bag of queers in Toronto the best.

I love universities. I love theatre. I love music, like Britney and Celine and Whitney. But also like Sam and Shawn. But also like instrumental shit like Tony Anderson. I also like some Arabic music sometimes, mostly Lebanese.

I like my cultural, ethnic expression as Canadian. I feel like I live like a Canadian. And a Canadian lives in a very specific way that isn't the way an Arab lives necessarily, though there is overlap. I am not like a Beirut gay guy, but I'm also not like the white gay Canadian. But I am more Gay Canadian than Beirut Gay. I am more Canadian than I am Lebanese. Had the colonial project won my mind and heart? Have I fallen in love with my prison ward? Do I really care so long as I get to be with him? Does it really matter? Is Lebaneseness some essential thing that I have to come back to? No, of course not. Even the Lebanese identity is made up of a mashup of previous and current identities. Fuck, even the Arab identity is that. And not a single one of these identities actually hold water because as I am finely splicing the sense of my Canadian-gay-Lebanese identity, I realize the dissimilarity in the unified theory of the Canadian-identity. Well this very same lack of unity exists in Lebanese identity. And certainly in Arab identity.

I've often troubled the fact that identity politics is so concerned about the macro, the sociological, and not considerate of the psychological and the personal. Identity politics can only go so far before it becomes blankets of blanket statements and holds no water what so ever.

I am ethnically Arab, I am culturally Canadian-Lebanese. Hmm.. Like that's not enough of an identity to make full description of the feeling I have. I am ethnically Arab, I am culturally Canadian, and I have Lebanese ancestry. That doesn't work either, I was born in Lebanon. I am ethnically Arab, I am culturally Canadian and sometimes Lebanese. Like, I suppose I'm trying to say that I am Canadian-Lebanese but the Canadian is the dominating voice. Like, I am a Canadianized Lebanese. Lol. Yeah, that's likely it. Just like Arabized Jews or Armenians. Wow, fascinating connection there – like Armenians living in Lebanon, some are like chill expressing culture in a Lebanese way and living in Lebanon forever, while also recognizing that some things ancestry and home-wise are Armenian, including language. That's super *it*!

My ethnicity is Canadianized Lebanese.

So the question becomes, what is Canadian? And what are my responsibilities to these anti-oppressive conversations from this lens?

I'm afraid this is all a fear of my Arabness and a hatred of my Arabness. I don't know, but I feel like I'm circling the right place.

Tuesday, October 27, 2018

I watched MT Space's AMAL this weekend in Kitchener. It's a play directed by a Lebanese Arab man and shares the story of a Syrian family fleeing the war and landing in Canada. Gulce was a part of this play as a performer/creator and gave me some insight into the process. Through movement and structural improvisation, the team of performer/creators worked together to build and devise the show. It sounds like a lot of the tenants of devised theatre existed in the rehearsal hall. She said Majdi, the director, always had an open rehearsal policy, which meant that anyone and everyone was welcome to come and watch the rehearsals. The play featured a lot of Arabic without the need of explanation or translation. The play features white characters playing Syrian grandmothers. The play featured a Cree man playing a Cree man and a Syrian man. The play featured some Arab actors. And the play had some of the non-Arab actors speaking in Turkish, German, or whatever language they had in place of the Arabic that the Syrian characters were speaking. It was riveting and full of robustness. It was spirited and scary and devastating and impactful. It was tragic and hopeful. And now I am reflecting on this play and what I understand of its process in relation to my own play and this concept of Arabization of playwriting.

What I do know is that Majdi had a dramaturg and a text specialist in the room during the rehearsals. With my short conversation with the text specialist (who is a playwright) he would take the words of the performer/creators and modify, amplify, or generally assist in the textual writing in the show. He said something like "they're the writers, I just facilitate their writing." And the dramaturg, similarly, works with the director to help facilitate the direction, flow, arc, and shape of the play. These are all very similar in the playwriting world. Am I looking at an Arabization of the play making process? Is this a devised process that is similar in shape and form across many plays? What would the women from QuoteUnquote describe their process like? Actually, I spoke with them, and they said they worked for six-week chunks (I think?) over three years (I'm sure) to create *Now You See Her*. They said that some of the women had never devised before and this was a new way of working but that they were richly political and offered a lot to the project which is why they were chosen. It felt like the two white women facilitated the creative process. But I don't know much more than that and I don't want to speculate.

As I'm continuing my work on *The Green Line*, I'm reaching a point of structure, form, and content which is really satisfying. I hope I have the abilities to write what I have in mind. Frankly, the playwriting class has been extremely useful in facilitating this. But then I have to reflect on all of this and on the central question – am I Arabizing the playwriting process? Is Majdi? Are the QuoteUnquote Collective Feminizing the playwriting process? Is this just devised theatre versus playwriting? When femme or Arab or queer bodies do something, is that something femme, Arab, queer? Is it femme, Arab, queer because they want it to be?

I'm afraid that if my process or style isn't overtly queered or politically Arabized, then I would be irrelevant. But I am either resentful of identity politics or I lean into them. I'm guessing the truth is somewhere in the middle. Identity politics are important to situate and recognize and orient my voice in the world, but my task as an artist is to create – it is to be a cultural and memory archive of a sliver of an experience in a moment of time and space. And even then, that's the by-product, my task is just to create. Now my task as a political person, as a responsible person, is to consider the implications of my creation and its impact in the political and cultural world. That is something deeply important to me. That is something that inevitably impacts my creation, consciously or not. But somewhere in all of this creation and politics, I am

allowed to just create and not be such a political activist. I am not saying I don't want to be an activist, but I also just want to be an artist sometimes. Like, hmm, what am I trying to say here? I feel it is a constant responsibility to situate my work in a way that is politically sexy – for grants, for festivals, for relevance? But I also am writing deeply personal stories that are my way of healing in this the world. Not only healing, but expressing and being. And I'm allowed to do that, I am saying I give myself permission to do that. To just be and express. If my work has healing and political implications, then I will be accountable and responsible to that as well. And if my work must be about politics, then I will lean into that creation as well. I'm not sure if any of this makes sense. I'm feeling very confused about all of this. The original question is about the "Arabization of the playwriting process." Am I getting closer to answering it somehow?

I'm not sure right now.

January 10, 2019

I just finished the first script workshop of newest draft of the Green Line. It was a really inspiring and exciting experience.

I haven't checked in in a while. Mostly because I have been so frustrated with the process and sometimes speaking about it takes away any creative energy so it's best to just do and not think and reflect.

But the time to reflect has come now. There are several things that happened this past month and a bit and several things that happened tonight that I want to talk about. First I want to talk about casting and the complexity of that. Then I want to talk about the play as a product of my writing, my discovery in play-creation, who I am in all of this. Then I want to talk about the motivating team that's come together and how we are bringing this script to life – conventionally or radically, I'm not sure.

Casting wasn't an easy task. I asked Mel at Rhubarb, whether casting should prioritize Arab people, even though it was proving extremely difficult to find people to audition. She gave me the permission I felt I was needing to do so – cast Arab folks with less experience and provide opportunity for lived experience to become artistic experience. I've cast, and one of my cast members has never had acting experience. I am certainly nervous, but I feel my time as a teacher at York has really given me a certitude in working with inexperienced performers. I am nervous for a number of reasons – the fact that I haven't directed much is my main thing -but I am excited and leaning into this discomfort. Rayan is the person who is not experienced as a performer, but she has an emotional availability like no other. I am eager to get started and see what we can do together!

Casting the role of Rami and Naseeb was easy. The young man, Laith was so powerful as a performer. He had a depth of impact, a pliability, and a maturity in his performance that he moved through an older and younger character with a lot of authenticity. I am excited to what he brings to the role and further, he brings an Arab perspective that is similar to mine in that he grew up in Canada entirely, but he is Iraqi Arab, not Lebanese Arab. I am excited by this. If tonight proved anything, it is that the conversations and personal connections to the text that each performer syphoned out of my words IS exactly what the "Arabization" of the playwriting process means. Perhaps a shift in my thinking about what that means is asked for. Because as I'll write below, my play is a conventional play, an English, classical story – but the content is radical. The content is new. Queer Arabs – yes!

I always say, I queer content, not form. Maybe now I Arabize content, not form. I represent Arabness as I know it, and that is justified, and that is full, and that is English speaking of travel and disconnected from the violence of war kind of Arab. And that is okay. I love stories, I love the archetypal heroes journey. These fairy tales are deeply embroidered in our spirits and we respond to them in meaningful ways. If I wish for my art to be political and culturally activated, then why not employ the resources of storytelling that work. The Arabization part comes in content. The Arabization part comes in the 4, 5, 6 Arabs working on this project relaying a potent story to an audience that is not familiar with this. Am I wrong to assume that? I guess, I just don't really care anymore. I care to tell a story with, about, and by people that haven't had many chances to represent themselves. I think a strong story is a strong story and people will respond to that. That feels to be my task here.

Actually all that said, if a part of my goal is to just feel in community with Arab friends who are similar others to me, then I am justified in that enterprise as well. Art and performance creation has the potential to bring communities together. Beyond just the literary merits of the writing existing in canonical spaces, it has the potential to bring expression, catharsis, and real affective change in people in community. That is where my art is concerned. My writing sounds and looks like the colonizer. So what? I have also began to sound and look like the colonizer. But something is different. I am othered. An Arab is othered. And my art sounds and looks like that as well. I am all of these things – and the community of artists now working on this place also are all of these things. We almost all speak Arabic, we almost all communicate in English. We all love theatre, art, performance. We all have this sensory understanding of our Arabness and it is shared in community and friendship and art making. I am seeing something clearly – it is not a shame that I write a “well made play.” This is the process of discovery for me. As I reflected before, I am a Canadianized Arab. This is the play a Canadianized Arab would write.

Am I oppressed for this? Probably not. I wonder if my understanding of “Canadianized Arab” is a submission to colonialism or a reconciliation. I really don't know and some days I think its one and other days I think it's the other. The answer matters. Did I like the play I wrote (style, form, etc.)? Yes, absolutely. Do I even want to write in Arabic? Not necessarily. Do I like the way Majdi Bou Matar and MADA theatre works? I appreciate it but I don't want to do it. Like I said before, I want to work like Rabih Alameddine and Wajdi Mouwad. And I think that's okay. I even want to work like Khalil Gibran. There is a breed of us out there. And we're okay to create work in our image as well.

Finally, regarding the workshop tonight. I'm getting so tired of writing so I don't think I'll go into a ton of detail. However, I found the workshop to be inspiring because besides the fruitful questions of character, story, plot, needs, and desires that were mined, there was a huge connection and ringing of the content and its relationship with the cast members working. There is a clear gift in having Arabic people working on a play like this. It is healing. The play itself needs some massaging, particularly in the latter half – but this isn't anything I didn't know. The ending of the play landed impactfully even though it wasn't fully fleshed out. And the characters, particularly, Mona and Yara, started to really come to life as full. Mona and Yara, the two women that I am trying to write as falling in love – I was having difficulty finding voice with them – but when I met with Amena, my dramaturg, she gave me rich history and emotional availability to the way some of these women might exist in that time. I think I've found a lot of it in this writing.

There surfaced a fascinating question – is it more powerful to call the city “unnamed Arab City” or “Beirut?” Amena told me to not shy away from using its name and that all the

European writers taught us their city by naming it in their work. This conversation surfaced again and tonight and people were interested into leaning into naming it Beirut. I have become interested in the idea too. I think Beirut would be a powerful location and character in the play. I think for the Rhubarb Festival, I will name It leave it unnamed, but going forward, I would like to try it as Beirut.

A lot is discovered in reading the play and more will be discovered in putting it on its feet. When you're staging Shakespeare, there is such a human process of self-discovery and it goes beyond the mechanics of the isolated roles of actor, director, stage manager, etc. etc. in play creation – as a writer/director working and striving to speak into a community, I feel this human process of self-discovery goes only deeper and further.

My work is inextricably linked to my social activism. I can't unlink the process from the product – so to answer my professor's statement of "you're political...now what?" This is it. ----THIS IS IT. THE WRITING, THE COMMUNITY, THE SHARING, THE STORY, THIS IS THE THING WE WERE WAITING FOR.

APPENDIX C: FULL SCRIPT

THE GREEN LINE
A PLAY BY MAKRAM AYACHE

Draft 5
Tuesday, February 17, 2019

© Makram Ayache 2019

Copyright in this work rests with author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

“Pain travels through families until someone is ready to feel it.”
- Steph Wagner

SETTING

Beirut, Lebanon.

CHARACTERS

Mona – F, 21 years old.

Yara – F, 21 years old.

Naseeb – M, 25 years old.

Rami – M, 26 years old.

Zidan – M, 28 years old, known as FIFI when in drag.

PUNCTUATION DETAILS

(...) Ellipses are a lingering, a beat or two, after the line.

(—) Hyphens are when the line follows comes in suddenly after.

(/) Slashes are when the line is interrupted by the following line.

PROLOGUE

Enter MONA and YARA on the Green Line.

Mona
The green line.

Yara
The green line is a line of demarcation in a state of war.

Mona
Imaginary, drawn by a grand designer who cleaves the land with his titanic axe—

Yara
—separating the conflicting factions. In our civil war, it split our single body into two.

Mona
East—

Yara
—and west—

Mona/Yara
—Christian and Muslim.

Yara
Not that we were ever really one body before.
Marked by a no man's land, destroyed by tanks, gunfire, and bombings—

Mona
—Like a stitch across our face.

Yara
But the thing about this line, in particular, was that it wasn't imaginary any more. The war drudged on for so long that the natural vegetation began to break through the red Earth and a literal green line ran from the southernmost tip of the city and extended into the lip of the sea.

Mona
It might have been beautiful—

Yara
—if it wasn't so ugly.

Mona
Returned to her nature, these ancient lands gave birth to ancient creatures. Jinns and faeries—

Yara
—Shytauns and demons—

Mona
—who roamed in the celestial canopies that no human dared to enter.

Yara
Even if one wanted to, they would have been shot by the snipers defending their respective territory.

Mona

But what if a person did get in? What would they find?

Yara

Who would they find?

The stage erupts into a club scene - the hidden queer nightlife of this middle eastern city.

YARA and MONA slowly fade into the back and exit as FIFI enters.

SCENE 1
An Unusual Meeting

ZIDAN enters as FIFI, his alter-ego drag person.

Fifi performs her drag number (a Whitney Houston song or something).

RAMI is watching from the audience. FIFI approaches him from the stage.

Fifi
Well aren't you cute.

Rami
Uhh...

Fifi
Shu bek Habibi?

Rami
Sorry...I—I don't speak Arabic.

Fifi
She doesn't speak Arabic!!!! Oooo a foreigner!!!!

Rami
Oh god.

Fifi
Which God habibi? We have Allah, el Boodha, Jesus, Shiva, whoever you like?

Rami
All of them?

Fifi
Very cute.

Rami
I'm sorry, please I don't like this—I'm just here to watch – here..

RAMI extends a dollar to FIFI..

Fifi
Come on sweetie, I'm not *that* cheap.

She slaps his hand away.

Rami
I'm—I'm so sorry—

Fifi
Is this your first gay bar?

Rami

N—No

Fifi

I've never seen you around.

Rami

First time here—in this city.

—uhh—I gotta go.

RAMI beelines for the exit.

Fifi

That's the smoking exit baby.

RAMI heads for another exit.

Rami

Oh god.

FIFI catches him by the exit.

Fifi

I tell you what, you have this cigarette with me, and I'll let you off for thinking I was only worth a dollar.

Rami

I don't smoke.

Fifi

You'll pick it up, everyone smokes here.

Rami

I'm okay.

Fifi

I'm Fifi

She extends a hand out, wrist up, palm down, for RAMI to touch.

RAMI shakes it awkwardly.

Rami

(Not so charmed)

Charmed...

Fifi

What brings you out here tonight?

Rami

Google.

Fifi

What'd you search, "Hey Google! Where's the closest place I could get some dick?" —

Rami

(Laughs)

Hey-no-come on—that's not why I'm here—

Fifi

Please, hunny, look around, that's why we're all here.

Rami

Probably not the lesbians.

Fifi

Touché

Rami

And neither am I.

Fifi

We get it we get it, you're celibate.

Rami

I'm not—It's just not that kind of night—

Fifi

What kind of night is it?

Rami

Long story.

Fifi

Aren't you mysterious?

Rami

You're the one with the caked-on face—what're you hiding?

Fifi

Nothing at all baby, my affections are spilling right out from the very beginning. Fifi tells it exactly as it is.

You want a drink?

Rami

Does this mean you'll let me off?

Fifi

Maybe.

Rami

I really shouldn't drink tonight.

Fifi

Let me get this straight, you came to a gay club to sit in a corner, not drink, and not fuck. Are you here to kill us?

Rami

No—no! My god—no! Oh my god!—

Fifi

—Calm down baby, I'm kidding—

Rami

Not funny.

I'm just—it's just—it's a weird night.

Fifi

OOoh foreigner you ARE mysterious. Let me guess: not out to mom and dad, visiting family for a month, got in a fight with your homophobic uncle, looked up the closest gay bar, badabing badaboom, here you are!

Rami

Who says I'm not out?

Fifi

OOOH! The plot thickens—come on, sweetie—one drink?

Rami

F-Fine! I'll have—a drink. One drink.

Fifi

Amazing. Wait right here. Two of the BEST vodka soda's with a twist of lime for our foreigner friend coming right up!

Rami

Great—

FIFI exits.

MONA enters. She takes RAMI in from afar.

Light shift.

MONA approaches RAMI who is now playing NASEEB. They are at their home.

Mona

Have you been drinking?

Naseeb

Huh?

Mona

Have you been drinking??

Naseeb

Go to bed Mona.

Mona

And you drove the car!

Naseeb

Habibti, leave me alone.

He shoves past her toward his room.

Mona
Where were you?

Naseeb
At Tarik's.

Mona
I fucking hate that guy!

Naseeb
Hey, watch your language!

Mona
Please, *please*, promise me you're not drinking and driving home! Promise me! Especially right now, just—just stay near.

Naseeb
I'm going to bed.

Mona
Did you hear what I said?

Naseeb
I thought you were asleep. So I had a drink or two? It's not a big deal.

Mona
I could smell it on your breath from the door.

Naseeb
It's not. a big. deal. Okay?

(Beat.)

I'm going to bed.

NASEEB exits.

A bell rings.

SCENE 2
An Unlikely of Friendships

The sounds of a campus.

YARA enters.

Yara
I remember that furtive glance as I was packing away my books—

Mona
—You looked at me for a hundred thousand years—And just as I began to taste your fragrance—

Yara
—I vacuumed the air with a quick clearing of my throat—

Mona
—I'm imagining your lips—

Yara
—Stop it—

Mona
—We both know—

Yara
—we can't let this grow—

Mona
—it won't end well—

Yara
—Not well at all—

Mona
—look at me—

Yara
—look away—

Mona
—I keep falling—

Yara
—stop it—

Mona
—you stop—

Yara
—I don't want this—

Mona
—me neither—

Yara
—then look away—

Mona
—I can't.

Yara
I can't.

Mona/Yara
I can't do this.

Beat.

Mona
How long have we been here?

Yara
For a hundred thousand years.

MONA and YARA *are not looking at each other.*

MONA *clears her throat.*

Mona
I didn't look at you for that long.
That was meaningless.
I'm just appreciating your beauty.
You're just beautiful.
That's all.
That's normal.

Yara
I've known I was anything but normal since I can remember.

Mona
I thought I saw something on your face.
That's all.

Yara
When I was a little girl my mother shrieked to my aunt "they found two lasagnas' in a car up the street!"

Mona
I like your hair style, I might do it like that.

Yara
She meant "lesbians."

Mona
That's all, right?

Yara
They found two lesbians up the street.

Mona

I like your shirt.

Yara
What's a lesbian, mama?

Mona
I like your chest.

Yara
A lesbian is a sick woman who lies with other women.

Mona
I like your breasts.

Yara
I want to say "Mama I learn more from your gossip than I do from the books at school."

Mona
—Be quiet!—

Yara
—But I stay quiet.

Light shift.

YARA settles on a bench and takes out a cigarette. She lights it.

MONA observes.

Mona
Can I have one?

YARA, silently, examines MONA. She slowly hands her a cigarette.

MONA lights it.

They smoke in silence.

Yara
You're in my morning class, right?

Mona
Yeah.

Yara
Beautiful necklace.

Mona
Thank you.

Yara
Real gold?

Mona
Yes, it's been in the family for generations.

Yara
Great.

Mona
What a boring class, hey?

Yara
Yeah it was...

Beat.

Yara
Look, I should get going. It was nice talking to you.

Mona
Ok—

Yara
I'd be careful wearing gold around here. Things aren't what they used to be.

MONA puts her hand to her necklace.

Mona
This is from my mother.

Yara
Then it'd be a shame to lose it.

Mona
I like to think it keeps me protected.

Yara
That will keep you protected?

Mona
Yep. Look at it.

MONA holds it up closer to YARA.

Yara
What is it?

Mona
A phoenix. This is the only gold we have in our family. I'm hoping I find a tall, rich, man who can take me far, far away from this town.

Yara
Is that right?

Mona
Absolutely. I'd go very far away if I could.

Yara
And you think a man will give you that?

Mona
Well...a tall rich man might.

Yara
Where do you want to go?

Mona
Mount Qaf

Yara
Mount Qaf? You know that's not a real place?

Mona
Well aren't you a joy kill.

Yara
I'm sensible.

They laugh.

Why do you want to go to Mount Qaf?

Mona
It's the highest place on Earth. Just a single step away from heaven.

Yara
Right.

Mona
Just get me out of *here*. I want to see places and meet people that I would never even dream of meeting!

Yara
You're peculiar.

Mona
I see you've got a pretty ring there!

YARA touches her ring...trying to hide it maybe?

Mona
You're married?

Yara
Soon to be.

Mona
Very lucky.

Yara
Thank you.

Mona
May God send you prospering and blessings!

Yara
Thank you.

Moment. They fully see each other.

YARA looks away.

MONA stays.

Yara
I—I gotta go.

YARA begins to exit.

Mona
What's your name?

Yara
Yara.

Mona
I'm Mona.

Yara
Nice to meet you.

YARA exits.

MONA exits.

SCENE 3
The Undressing Room

The club music comes back on, FIFI and RAMI are in the back room with two tall glasses of vodka sodas and an open bottle of vodka.

Fifi

Okay, lemme guess again: you *are* out to mom and dad, but they want you to get married to a woman and do whatever the fuck you want on the side? You came to the gay club in protest.

Rami

Wrong again.

Fifi

Then what the hell got you here?

Rami

Keep guessing, I'm really starting to enjoy this.

Fifi

Just as I'm really starting to get bored of it.

Rami

How about for each hint I give you, you clean off a part of your face?

Fifi

Are you saying this make up is not clean?

Rami

I'm saying I want to see the real you.

Fifi

Hunny this *is* the real me.

Rami

No, no, the real you has beautiful eyes.

Fifi

Ok...

RAMI *touches FIFI'S biceps.*

Rami

beautiful biceps.

Fifi

Mhmm..

Rami

A beautiful beard.

Fifi

But not beautiful contouring?

Rami

That's not what I'm saying.

Fifi
I thought you're not looking for sex tonight.

Rami
I'm not.

Fifi
Coulda fooled me.

Rami
You're the one who got me drunk.

Fifi
I didn't realize it'd make you a hummus huntin' thirst trap.

Rami
What were you hoping?

Fifi
To make a new friend.

Rami
Maybe that's why *I* came to the club.

Fifi
Right, that's why you're still rubbing my biceps.

RAMI *stops rubbing FIFI'S bicep, he's embarrassed.*

Rami
It's the drinks.

Fifi
That's a dangerous claim.

Rami
Ok, you got me—I'm confused because I'm a gay guy turned on by a drag queen.

Fifi
You know most drag queens are gay guys too.

Rami
Not all of them.

Fifi
You are so progressive, are you from Amsterdam?

Rami
Canada.

Fifi
How cute.

Rami
So are you.

Fifi
From Canada? No baby I was born and raised here.

Rami
I meant cute too.

Fifi
You're really hoping to see me without make up, aren't you?

Rami
A little bit. Aren't you afraid dressed like that?

Fifi
Aren't you afraid to wear Corduroys?

Rami
(*Laughs*)
They're in style.

Fifi
(*Sarcastic*)
Sure.

Rami
But seriously, aren't you...?

Fifi
To dress in drag?

Rami
Yeah.

Fifi
What's there to be afraid of? That crowd was eating it up.

Rami
But past these walls?

Fifi
What do you know about past these walls?

Rami
You know, for a place so full of war, it's pretty fun.

Fifi
Really?

Rami
What?

Fifi
You come here, party, eat, sleep, shit everywhere, then leave. I'm sure it *is* "pretty fun."

Rami
I'm not here to party anyway—

Fifi
Coulda fooled me—pass me the wipes.

RAMI hands FIFI some make up wipes. FIFI faces the dressing room mirror. She pulls out a cigarette.

Fifi
I'm gonna take my face off now. Not for you—but because I need to get home tonight—

Rami
So you are afraid!—

Fifi
No—I just know this city better than you, Foreigner—

Rami
My name is Rami, not Foreigner.

Fifi
I insist its Foreigner.

Rami
(*sarcastically*) Oh Thanks.

Fifi
My pleasure.

Rami
What's your name?

Fifi
Fifi.
I already said—

Rami
Your real name.

Beat.

Fifi
Ooooh...now we both have a secret.

Rami
Oh boy, you are a handful.

FIFI methodically removed her make-up.

Fifi
Baby I've been a handful since I came into this world. My mother swears when I was born, I was born singing and dancing. They put me in all the right places though. Boy scouts. An all-boys catholic school. I was even youth leader of my church group on Sundays and Tuesdays. All the things that a straight little man should do! My father would even take me bird hunting in the mountains.

I remember the first bird I ever killed.

You could see it flying towards us from the distance – “an easy shot” my father kept saying. I didn’t want to do it, but he kept smacking me on the shoulder, encouragingly me at first. But at some point, it started to feel like a threat. When I killed it, he howled in celebration.

But I froze. I stood there watching the bird plummet from the sky in slow motion, the snow up to my ankles, the frozen trees silently judging my massacre. And then I began to weep. Now my father froze. His faggy little son weeping for a tiny bird that was going to be our dinner. “Stop” he said. And I didn’t. “Stop it... come on now.” I didn’t. I cried harder. “Stop!” And he slapped me so hard I fell into the snow

Am I afraid to dress like this? I’ve seen it all baby. Harassed, bullied, threatened, even arrested for a night. I simply don’t give a fuck anymore.

Rami
You ever thought of leaving?

Fifi
No.

Not a chance.

FIFI’S finished cleaning her face. She retreats behind a screen, begins undressing.

Rami
She’s modest.

From behind the screen.

Fifi
Can’t give it all away honey.

Rami
Can I have some more vodka?

Fifi
And she’s not drinking tonight.

Rami
Shaddup.

Fifi
Of course you can.

*RAMI prepares another drink.
ZIDAN exits from behind the screen, remnants of his drag persona linger in his outfit, but everything is “public presentable.”*

Zidan
My name is Zidan.

Rami
Wow...hello...

Zidan
I’m going to kiss you now.

Rami

Yep, yeah, okay.

They kiss.

ZIDAN notices RAMI'S necklace. It's the same one that MONA has.

Zidan
Beautiful necklace.

Rami
Thank you.

RAMI tucks it into his shirt.

Zidan
She wears her dihab for *everyone* to see.

Rami
Dihab?

Zidan
Gold.

Rami
Hah—I guess so. I never wear this out.

Zidan
Why not, it's absolutely stunning and goes really well with those eyes.

Rami
It's complicated.

Zidan
You stole it?

Rami
Something like that.

ZIDAN is slightly taken aback.

Zidan
Suspicious liar boy comes to nightclub with stolen gold necklace hanging from his neck. *Doesn't* want to kill everyone. Very mysterious.

Rami
Oh shut up.

Zidan
Rami you feel very familiar. Have we met before?

Rami
I don't think so. It's my first time visiting this place.

Beat.

Zidan

I'll figure you out.

ZIDAN begins heading back to the dancefloor.

Rami
Right—

RAMI trails behind.

ZIDAN and RAMI exit.

SCENE 4
Assignments

MONA enters.

Mona

When I was a little girl my father would take me to the highest of his cranes and give me a view of the entire city. It looked so different back then.

Yara

I was born in a tent.

Mona

He would point out all the buildings that he helped build. He was a foreman – one of the best. He would always tell me if I could build buildings, I could do anything.

Yara

Bloodied walls, graffiti monsters, and bullet shells were the playgrounds of my childhood.

Mona

From that high up, I truly thought we were flying.

Yara

And my mother is a warrior woman.

Mona

I kept imagining if I jumped out of the crane, wings would peel off my back, like an Angel.

Yara

She ate cigarettes for breakfast and even the men in our alleys would cower at her sight.

Mona

At first, I would glide over the city. Then, with each flap, I go higher and higher and even higher. The earth becomes so small until I can't see it.

Yara

I remember a fig tree at the edge of our camp. Every day, my father plucked a fruit and sliced it into perfect thirds, one for my mother, one for me, and one for him.

Mona

Higher and higher and higher.

Yara

One day I asked him "baba, why don't you pluck three figs each day?"

He said "we don't ask for more than life can give us."

"But there are so many fruits on that tree."

"Just as well, there are so many people in our camp. There are others we are responsible to, not only ourselves."

Mona

And the Earth vanishes into a mote of dust.

Yara

After the war began my father was killed and we were forced to resettle in the west of the city with the rest of the Muslims.

Mona

But I can only see the green line. No matter how high I fly, I could still see the green line.

Yara

And I went to the one university that allowed refugees to attend for free. I went to study engineering.

Mona

I keep trying to escape the green line, but I can't—

Yara

Trying to escape the war—

Mona

—by studying—

Yara

—like a stitch across our face—

Mona

—My father always said, “your brother is terrible in school so it's up to you to do well and get you both out of here.”

Yara

I don't want a lot. Just to survive. To live, maybe a little better than my mother did.

Mona

That's a lot of pressure on a person.

Yara

“I believe in God...” my mother tells me, “because he sent me a daughter who has a mind to build us homes.”

Mona

After mom and dad died, I had to complete my studies no matter what—

Yara

She said, “you will build us all homes.”

Mona

—And then I met her—

Yara

I stopped believing in anything a long time ago.

Mona

And it's as if I've known her for a hundred thousand years.

Yara

—And then I met her—

Beat. YARA looks at MONA.

And it's as if I've known her for a hundred thousand years.

Mona

One cigarette turned to two, turned to three, turned infinity for a chance to speak to her.

Yara
We're friends.

Mona
We're only friends.

Yara
That's all—

Mona
One night we were at the library working on an assignment.

YARA and MONA at the library, working on an assignment.

Yara
Everybody knows about the pyramids Mona.

Mona
Yeah, because they're amazing!

Yara
No one ever talks about Shibam Hadhramaut.

Mona
The buildings in Yemen?

Yara
Buildings? They're ancient skyscrapers made from mud and brick – still standing today. *That's* an engineering marvel!

Mona
Oh please, they're like seven stories, hardly skyscrapers. The last rainfall almost washed them away.

Yara
That's what makes them more amazing Mona. It's a desert port—a meeting of the minds for travelers from the farthest reaches of Asia to the ends of Europe—always at risk of destruction from erosion or war. Anyone could stack a pile of bricks into a pyramid. But Shibam...that was a testament to human collaboration and perseverance – for a clan of 16th century merchants, this kind of urban planning was unheard of.

Mona
Hmm...

Yara
You know I'm right.

Mona
But the pyramids are the largest in the ancient world—

Yara
You're wrong there—The Pyramid of Cholula in Mexico is the largest in the ancient world.

Mona
What? No that can't be right.

Yara
Yes, it is. How much research have you done?

Mona
Quite a bit—

Yara
—It could be more thorough.

Mona
You're being rude.

Yara
I'd like for us to get a good grade—

Mona
And you think I don't?

Yara
I'm a bit more prepared Mona, that's all I'm saying.

Mona
If we can't even agree on what structure—

Yara
—let's do Shibam.

Mona
No.

Yara
Stop being a child!

Mona
Don't speak to me like that!

MONA begins packing her belongings.

Yara
Wait—wait, Mona, stop—

Mona
No.

Yara
Stop, stop.

MONA keeps packing.

Yara
I'm sorry, hey, stop (*gently stopping MONA*). I'm sorry—

Mona
It's just a stupid assignment.

Yara
I'm sorry.

Beat.

Yara
What's this about?

Mona
Nothing...

Yara
Obviously something—

Mona
No...forget it.

Yara
—Mona...

Beat.

Mona
It's stupid...but...the pyramids were the only place we travelled all together.

Yara
Oh...

Long pause as MONA considers what to say next.

Mona
When I was seven, my parents took Naseeb and I to see them.

Yara
I see.

Mona
Sitting on those rocks—they were enormous. I was afraid, but my mom sat beside me and told me story after story until the sun dipped into the horizon. She spoke of God building these stones one by one, sculpting them from the rocks in faraway lands, breathing magic into each and every one of them. She told me if we sat on the rocks, we could feel the breathing of God. And so we sat together, breathing, listening.

Then of course, Naseeb starts climbing the pyramid like a stupid monkey and my dad was yelling at him to get down, my mom and I just laughing at their banter.

Yara
That's beautiful.

Mona
We didn't do things like that often. You know they were caught in a cross fire...

Yara
Mona you don't have—

Mona
I imagine they were flirting and laughing, they did that a lot, they were romantics, then the shooting began. It came from all sides and all at once. But those were the early days of war, before anyone really believed we were in a war. It all feels so normal until it doesn't.

Beat.

Yara
I know. I'm so sorry.

Beat.

Mona
Can we please do the pyramids?

Yara
Yes...of course, of course. We should do the pyramids.

YARA places her hand on MONA's hand.

They look at each other for a beat.

Then quickly release each other and look to their books.

ZIDAN and RAMI enter, walking through the space where YARA and MONA are working. Club music slowly rises. ZIDAN raises his cup to the two women as if they are other guests at the club. He turns to RAMI and gives him a kiss on the cheek.

Light shift as MONA is entering her home.

Mona
Naseeb?

RAMI looks to her.

RAMI, ZIDAN, and YARA exit.

SCENE 5
Land Deeds

This scene picks up the action immediately from the moment before. MONA at home, NASEEB arriving.

Naseeb
I got them! I got them! I got the papers!

Mona
What papers? What are you talking—

Naseeb
Mama and Baba left these in their will and it was a matter of time before the lawyers handed them to us. And I told them— you know, if it wasn't for Tarik, I don't think this would have been possible. You remember the raids on the law firms?

Mona
The raids?

Naseeb
Back in March, the raids, the raids—

Mona
Ye-yeah what about them?

Naseeb
The land deed could have been lost in those – but, thanks to Tarik, we *got the papers!* We should move up there as soon as possible!

Mona
What papers? Land deeds? What are you talking about

Naseeb
Mona, Mama and Baba left us a plot of land.

Mona
What?!

Naseeb
In the Chouf—we can leave this city. Tarik says its safer up there, we can stay with our own and leave the violence here.

Mona
I know.

Naseeb
It's much safer.

Mona
That's great.

Beat as MONA continues tidying the house.

Naseeb
You don't sound convinced.

Beat.

Mona
Could I finish school first?

Naseeb
What?

Mona
University. How will I get to class if we're four hours into the mountains?

Naseeb
What? Who cares about school— in case you missed it, there's a war going on around us.

Mona
It's important to me.

Naseeb
Are you serious?

Mona
Naseeb, with my degree, we can leave this entire country, this war.

Naseeb
You're so naïve. We can hardly leave our homes right now. It's getting worse every day!

Mona
What's your plan? So we have a plot of land? We're just gonna camp out there?

Naseeb
—we can stay with someone until we can afford to build—

Mona
How are we gonna afford to build— Naseeb, habibi, you're not thinking clear. Where are we gonna get money—

Naseeb
I'll work.

Mona
What work?!

Naseeb
We can use the money in the inheritance.

Mona
That's for my studies.

Naseeb
Mona—

Mona
No way, Naseeb, no way, that's for my studies.

Naseeb
It's in my name.

Mona

Naseeb! That's not fair! I'm a few months away from finishing. Then I'll be an engineer! You understand that's our ticket out of here, how don't you get that?

Naseeb

This isn't a conversation/

Mona

/I'll be an engineer! We/ can leave!

Naseeb

/Have you seen the blockades going through the middle of the city? They've split us into two. Have you missed that? Tarik said if the Christians—

Mona

Tarik Tarik Tarik! Forget him for a second!

Naseeb

He's trying to help us!

Mona

I need to finish school. *THAT* isn't a conversation!

Naseeb

You idiot, it's going to get a lot worse!

Mona

You want to go into the mountain, sleep at some random strangers' house—

Naseeb

They're not strangers! They all know Mama and Baba!

Mona

/Are you fucking serious?

Naseeb

Watch your mouth—

Mona

Are you fucking serious Naseeb?! This is a huge decision, I am entitled to weigh in!

Naseeb

Mona I am doing what I see best for this family!

Mona

You are not Baba!

Naseeb

I'M TRYING TO TAKE CARE OF YOU!!!

He grabs her viciously.

Beat.

He lets her go.

Beat.

Naseeb
Of us.

Mona
Not like this—

Naseeb
I'm trying my best. Just...stop being so difficult. Stop it! You don't know what's happening out there. You've got your head so far in your books learning how to build buildings you don't see them falling all around you. Last night, they destroyed an entire village along the sea. Militia groups are popping up left, right, and center. Anyone who can get their hands on some weapons are fighting to get some power. Did you forget what happened to mom and dad?

Did you forget that they were just going to a party, for some dancing...

She was wearing her favorite silver dress.

Mona
No I didn't...

Naseeb
She packed his best suit in the car. She was going to pick him up from work.

Mona
Naseeb...

Naseeb
Did you forget that Mona? They didn't even let us see their bodies./

Mona
/Ok...ok...It's okay./

Naseeb
/That's how badly they were torn apart by the bullets.

Mona
Okay, habibi, okay...

Naseeb
I should have done something then—

Mona
You didn't know. We didn't know. You couldn't have done anything.

Naseeb
I don't want anything to happen to you.

Mona
Okay...

Beat.

Naseeb
We're going to the mountains.

Mona

Let's sleep on it. We'll talk tomorrow, okay?

Beat.

Mona

Thank you... for doing all this work. Thank you.

Naseeb

It's my duty. Please don't make this any more difficult than it needs to be.

MONA realizes it's a losing battle and exits in a huff.

NASEEB exits.

SCENE 6
Butterfly Effect

YARA enters.

Yara

If this war claims me, I want to be left out for the birds. Like Antigone's brother, I want to be plucked, eyes and limbs by the very creatures that circle the sky. This earth never made much sense to me because I don't think I made much sense to it. I am refugee of war thrust into another country's war. I can't imagine being in the sky outside the belly of a bird. This war rises and falls and we feel its violations in our bones.

I am armored, I am suspicious, and I am angry.

A seven-year-old girl and her mother are buying sandwiches – it's midweek – sunny, hot, the skies are a dusted dry blue – a man comes in, he's angry – the little girl says "mama what's wrong with him?" her mother replies "shush, stay quiet" – the man pulls a pistol and fires 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 shots into the legs, chest, shoulders, face of another man – the little girl starts crying – her mother cups her mouth – the little girl can't breathe – the mother holds tighter – the little girl thinks she's going to die – the man leaves the shop and the little girl inhales.

She inhales the pool of blood seeping beyond the counter. She inhales her salty tears. She inhales the screaming and the crying. She inhales but she doesn't breathe.

Who else would this seven-year-old girl become when she is a woman?

I am armored, I am suspicious, and I am angry.

Beat.

And I'm to be married to Karam in a few months. He is a pious man. He reminds me of Baba. He doesn't offer much but he'll give me quiet.

But the soil beneath my quiet life is shifting with *her* voice.

Mona...

A slow, romantic, 50s Arabic song covered by a contemporary singer, plays gently in the background.

YARA begins to dance with herself. MONA enters and shadows YARA's movements.

The music swells and becomes the music of the night club.
ZIDAN and RAMI enter.

Music is pounding.

Light shift to night club.

ZIDAN hands another glass of vodka soda to RAMI.

Zidan

(Speaking loudly over the music)

THAT OVER THERE IS THE OWNER. WE CALL HIM BABA IMAD.

Rami

COOL!

Zidan

WELCOME TO THE VIP LIFE BABY.

Rami

I NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD BE LIKE THIS. HERE. IN THE MIDDLE EAST. ITS SOOO GAY!

Zidan

THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE A FOREIGNER.

Rami

AND YOU'RE AN ASS!

They laugh.

RAMI leans in for a kiss.

Zidan

WE'RE NOT ALLOWED TO KISS IN PUBLIC.

Rami

EVEN IN THE GAY CLUB?

Zidan

YUP! LET'S GO DANCE!!!!

They dance. It is a movement that choreographs partying, drinking, crowds, sex, and lust, but no kissing. The music increases in volume as the performers move through the space. MONA and YARA enter as club patrons. Their movements are ghost like, light and indirect, anti-parallel to ZIDAN and RAMI. MONA and YARA never face the audience.

After the dance, music is thumping quietly in the background.

RAMI and ZIDAN exit.

The sounds of a siege fill the space – gun fire, yelling, small bombs, and machinations of war.

SCENE 7
A Shelter of Dreams

The sounds subdue but remain.

Mona

One night, Christian and Muslim forces hold the university in a lock down with their clashes. We are in the university shelters. Water is distributed, and candles are our only source of light.

Lights Shift.

Mona

There was an uneven air in the building. At first, a lot of fear, but as the hours passed, pockets of quiet conversations and laughter emerged.

Yara

Then someone started singing.

Mona

Others joined in melodic whispers.

Light group singing and the ambient sounds of people living closely together is heard in the background.

It's late into the lockdown and YARA and MONA are privately off to the side with candles. They begin smoking.

Mona

I haven't had a chance to call Naseeb, he's gotta be worried sick..oh god..what do I do?

Yara

He probably heard about the university lockdown on the radio.

Mona

I know but if I could just call the house—

Yara

You're not the only one Mona.

Mona

I know that but—

Yara

We'll be able to leave in the morning.

Mona

What makes you so sure?

Yara

It's not my first clash?

Mona

It's not?

Yara

No—

Mona

When was the last time—

Yara

Don't worry about that. I've been in worst. We're a university campus, what would it benefit anyone to kill off a bunch of unarmed students?

Mona

I suppose so—

Yara

I know so.

Mona

I'm afraid.

Beat.

Yara

I know.

Beat.

Mona

I'm sorry—I'm going on about this and you're probably feeling the same way—I'm really sorry.

Yara

No, Mona, it's okay. I'm okay.

Mona

Have you spoken to Karam? Or your mother?

Yara

I haven't.

Mona

They must be worried sick.

Yara

I know. But, I promise you, there is nothing we can do other than wait this out. The men out there will either kill each other or get bored enough and go home.

Mona

It's terrible.

Yara

Yes.

Mona

How are you so...brave?

Yara

I'm not brave, I'm just tired.

MONA laughs.

MONA takes a beat, still anxious.

Yara
You make this *face* when you're afraid—I notice it every time.

Mona
What face?

Yara
(*points at MONA*) That face!

Mona
I'm not doing anything—

Yara
It's endearing.

Mona
Oh whatever—

Yara
Like this:

YARA mimics MONA's afraid face.

Mona
(*Laughs*) You look stupid.

Yara
Case in point.

Mona
You said I looked cute—

Yara
I said endearing—

Mona
Whatever—

Beat. They continue smoking.

Mona
Naseeb wants us to move to the mountains.

Yara
What?

Mona
Four hours into the mountains.

Yara
Really?

Mona
He found a land deed from our parents that was lost in a law firm raid.

Yara

That's great!

Mona

He wants to take the money our parents left us and build a house up there.

Yara

Why do you sound upset?

Mona

With the money for my tuition.

Yara

Oh...

Mona

He says it doesn't matter if I finish or not.

Yara

Well...

Mona

Well what?

Yara

Maybe he's right.

Mona

What? You agree with him?

Yara

Look at us...in this shelter.

Mona

So what—you even said, it'll pass.

Yara

Mona, he is right. It's getting increasingly dangerous to stay down here. If you have the opportunity to leave the city, then go.

Mona

But I won't be able to finish my schooling!

Yara

So what?

Mona

I won't be able to see you.

Yara

Mona.

Mona

You're okay with that?

Yara

It's better if you're safe.

Mona
You're my dearest friend, you understand that right?

Yara
I care a great deal about you—

Mona
—then how can you so easily send me off?

Yara
In the interest of your safety—

Mona
I want to finish this degree.

Beat.

With you.

Beat.

You want me to go up to the mountain and then *what*?

Yara
You live.

Mona
What life? You all sound the same. Naseeb—I don't know where he's out half the time and he comes home drunk each night! He says he's at Tarik's. That man fills his head with...ideas... stupid stupid ideas. I don't want to go to the mountain. I want to stay here, and finish this degree, I want to be here with you.

Beat.

Yara
Mona...

Mona
What're you so afraid of?

Yara
Don't ask for more than what the world will give you—

Mona
The world will give me what I plant in it.

Yara
Your brother knows what's best for you.

Mona
How can you say that of all people?!

Yara
Despite everything that's happened in your life—

Mona

Of course! Because of everything that's happened. How are you so... resigned?

Yara
I'm sensible...

Mona
And I want to leave this place and I can only do that with this degree.

Yara
What do you even want to do once you leave?

Mona
Then I can live. On my own terms, Yara.

I always imagined this large window, like in the French movies, except mine will have the most lavish curtains, a cerulean blue with royal gold trimmings. When I leave I will have a home that sits on the highest mountain and overlooks rolling green valleys. Just before the window will be the most beautiful arm chair and I'll sit, day and night reading and dreaming and thinking and all the afflictions of war will become a distant memory. When I leave I'll be with someone who I love very much.

Beat.

Yara
The tall rich man?

Mona
Maybe...

Yara
Mona...

Mona
It can all happen.

Yara
It's best to leave your dreams for your sleep.

MONA laughs, not amused.

Mona
I've never met a person less afraid of a bullet than their own dreams. You're brave Yara. Be brave.

Street sounds rise as the two women fall asleep.

SCENE 8
Where Past and Future Depart

RAMI and ZIDAN enter. ZIDAN is holding a bag with sandwiches and the two of them are drinking bottles of beer.

Zidan
One for you...one for me

ZIDAN hands RAMI a shawarma.

Rami
Amazing—thank you—

Zidan
Have you ever had a shawarma?

Rami
I live in Canada, not under a rock.

Zidan
Well it's basically a rite of passage to get a shawarma when you're wasted in this city!

Rami
Hey I'm not wasted!

Zidan
Sure!

ZIDAN slaps RAMI on the ass.

Rami
Watch it!

Zidan
Are you scared?

Rami
No—

Zidan
(Doesn't believe him) Really?

Rami
A little.

Zidan
Foreigner.

RAMI gives ZIDAN the middle finger.

Zidan
I think I figured you out.

Rami
Here we go again.

Zidan

You're here to find a bride because mama and baba wanna marry you off. BUT, you're gay. So you've run away from the clutches of your family and now you're out dancing and drinking with the biggest queen in the city. Good for you, you little rebel.

RAMI laughs.

Rami

You have a wild imagination.

Zidan

I need it to thrive *baby*. (*Shift*) But for real...what's your story?

Rami

I'm an architect.

Zidan

Oooh...sexy...

Rami

Well, not quite. Almost finished. My father always wanted me to be a civil engineer...but...I don't know, it just wasn't really for me. Too many numbers and concrete and grey. If it were really up to me, I would have been a visual artist or something like that. So we met somewhere in the middle – architecture. It's nice and all... trust me, I've grown to love it... but I don't know... can't I just paint things without needing them to land somewhere?

Zidan

Well, why don't you just become a painter then? Or do you always do what daddy tells you?

Rami

(*Awkwardly laughs*) Hey, come on now.

Zidan

My father wanted me to be a doctor. I became a queen instead.

Rami

And you're very good at it.

Zidan

Thank you so much habibi.

Beat as RAMI looks around then leans in and kisses ZIDAN on the lips. They get caught up in the moment and then release.

Rami

Wow—

Zidan

You're fun, I like you.

Rami

I like you too.

They kiss.

Beat.

Rami
Zidan?

Zidan
Mhm...

Rami
Can you tell me about the war?

Zidan
Well if that isn't the quickest way to kill a boner.

RAMI laughs.

Rami
No seriously.

Zidan
It ended, the end. What more do you want to know?

Rami
What do you know about the green line?

Beat. Zidan is a bit uncomfortable.

Zidan
What is this about?

Rami
The green line...where is it?—

ZIDAN moves away.

Rami
Zidan...

Zidan
You're being a real...foreigner right now.

Rami
Hey, come on.

Zidan
What's past is past—don't ask these sorts of questions.

Rami
I'm sorry, I just—

Zidan
—you know, I think this is a bad idea.

Rami
Zidan!

Zidan
I think I'm gonna go home.

Rami
Waitwaitwait—

Zidan
No thanks. Whatsapp me sometime.

ZIDAN begins to exit.

Rami
Zidan! Please just wait!

Zidan
NO!

Rami
I buried my father today!

Beat. ZIDAN stops.

Zidan
...What?

Rami
I buried my father today.

Beat.

Zidan
Today?

Rami
Today.

Zidan
I'm—I'm sorry.

Rami
He never so much as spoke of this place. He was quiet, mild, but he was the most hardworking man I ever knew. He'd smoke chains of cigarettes like they were the air he needed to breathe.

He didn't even teach us Arabic. But then he wanted to be buried here.

Zidan
That's why you're here?

Rami
Yes—

RAMI removes an envelope from his pocket.

Rami
He left me this picture and this necklace.

Zidan
Rami...

Rami

He wrote: "Return this necklace to the apartment in this photograph. Find it where Independence meets Damascus, overlooking where the green line once ran." Then there's something written in Arabic...look.

Zidan

Naseeb. It says Naseeb, 1981.

Rami

That's his name. Naseeb.

RAMI begins to cry.

ZIDAN witnesses as MONA and YARA enter from another time.

Mona

Naseeb lost his mind when he heard about the clashes near the university.

Naseeb/Zidan/Yara

No more! We're leaving, this isn't a conversation!—

Mona

He yells like a volcano. I can't suppress him, I can't yell as loudly. I need to finish school! I need to leave this place! I need to find a new home! I need to be with her—

Yara

—we can't let this grow—

Mona

—I can't be without her—

Yara

—it won't end well—

Mona

—I can't breathe without her—

Yara

—not well at all—

Light shift. At the university.

Mona

I can't come to class anymore...

Yara

What happened?

Mona

Naseeb's hired builders. Says they'll be building a home for us. He's no longer paying for my tuition. I told him he can go without me, but I won't leave the apartment.

Yara

No, no, no. Mona you go with him!

Mona

I can't go without you.

Yara
Are you out of your mind.

Mona
Stop this Yara! Stop it!

Yara
There is no choice here.

Mona
—you're acting like—

Yara
Like what?!

Mona
Like you don't... you're acting like we're friend.

Yara
You're truly out of your mind.

Mona
No!

Yara
I am getting married next month.

Mona
No...

Yara
Mona

Mona
When you speak to me, you look at me...really look at me... like you're seeing my fucking heart beating in my eyes. This war, out there, all around us, it doesn't mean anything when you're here. I know you know that—

Yara
Stop this—

Mona
Don't tell me otherwise—don't. You're quiet, you keep to yourself, but not with me. With me you share your cigarettes. With me you speak, you tell me your heart.

Yara
Enough...

Mona
I don't want to go...

MONA begins to cry.

Mona
Don't make me go...

Yara
Mona...oh Mona.

YARA holds MONA.

Mona
I love you.

Beat.

MONA kisses YARA. Then, YARA pushes her away.

Yara
WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?!

Mona
Yara...

Yara
You're insane!

YARA begins to exit.

Mona
Yara wait—please!

Yara
Don't ever speak to me again! You're sick!

You sick woman!

YARA exits.

SCENE 9
Spirit of a Funeral

NASEEB enters.

Naseeb
I was buried today.

And when I open my eyes, I see a green line and I wonder if I am left for the demons and shaytauns. My son is weeping. My wife is weeping. My family is weeping, and I wonder if I am left for the demons and shaytauns.

I move through this dust and I wonder if I will find my mother and father. I wonder if I will meet my ancestors and their ancestors and their ancestors. Or, I wonder, if I am left for the demons and shaytauns.

I see my son weeping. I see my son dancing. And drinking. On the night of my funeral.

I asked him to do for me a final task.

All I can do is wait now.

Lights shift. At MONA and NASEEB's apartment. MONA is studying. NASEEB enters the house.

Mona
It's late.

Naseeb
Would you make me dinner?

Mona
I'm studying.

Naseeb
I've been running around all day. Now, please.

Mona
I said I'm studying.

Naseeb
For what?

Mona
I have exams—

Naseeb
To what end?

Mona
I'll figure it out—

Naseeb
Make some food please.

Mona
I already told you—

Naseeb

I'm not going to ask again!

Beat.

Naseeb

I was in a line up for three hours...in the blistering heat... to get you this bread.

He sets down a bag of bread, a rare commodity in this time of war.

Mona

Oh my god.

Naseeb

How long has it been since we've had some?

MONA rushes to the bag and smells the bread.

Mona

Months now...

Naseeb

It's still fresh.

Mona

It smells like it.

Naseeb

It's yours...will you please make some dinner now?

We're have to leave soon. There are blockades going up everywhere in the city. I was stopped at a checkpoint.

Mona

What?!

Naseeb

I was coming back from the east.

Mona

Why were you in the east?

Naseeb

There are areas to cross along the line, but new checkpoints are popping up.

Mona

Why do you need to cross at all?

Naseeb

Luckily these people were Muslim, so they let me through without any problems.

Mona

What if they weren't though? Or what if they didn't like how you looked?

Naseeb

I know—

Mona

If we stay on our side, nothing will happen.

Naseeb

We have to cross to get to the mountain. There are areas we can do it but it's getting riskier.

Mona

Why were you in the east?

Naseeb

I was looking at our plot of land. And I was getting the bread.

Mona

Are you insane?

Naseeb

I got it for you.

Beat.

Mona

Naseeb—

Naseeb

We're moving next week. A beautiful plot of land in the Chouf.

Beat.

Naseeb

I've put the apartment up for sale—

Mona

This apartment?

Naseeb

Tarik has family in the Chouf. We'll stay with them until the builders put up the new house.

Mona

You're out of your fucking mind!

Naseeb

Language!

Mona

Stop, Naseeb. Just stop! You make these decisions as if you have something over me. Some...some...insight higher than me. This is *my* home. *My* apartment! I took my first steps here. Over there—mom taught me how to read. Here—dad and I built our first model house together out of popsicle sticks we collected over a summer. You and I used to race our bikes in circles right on that balcony. This is *my* home! I am NOT moving. I can't believe you did this!

Naseeb

You'll die here.

Mona

Then leave me to die! You aren't protecting me, you're protecting yourself! You're doing what's best for you and that's it. Take this fucking bread but leave me here!

Naseeb

What in the world do you plan to do? You want to finish school and then walk out of this country? As if it's that easy!

Mona

Leave me to decide. Just leave *me* to decide!

Beat.

Mona

Make your own dinner tonight.

She exits.

Naseeb

Mona! Mona, hey! Don't walk away from me.

Sounds of a city in the night rise.

SCENE 10
A Shifting

ZIDAN enters. He is with RAMI out in the city.

Zidan

My mother is Muslim and my father is a Christian...the green line took a lot of our family.

Rami

I'm sorry—

Zidan

So please excuse me if I don't want to talk about it.

Rami

I leave in a week.

Zidan

So you have a week to fulfill his wishes.

Rami

I don't know how to do this Zidan.

Zidan

What about your mother? Any family that can help?

Rami

My mother is mourning.

Zidan

I'm sorry Rami, I can't help you with this.

Rami

Why not?

Zidan

Because...it's not my responsibility.

Rami

Wow...

Zidan

Look—I just thought you were cute—I didn't...I don't want to get mixed up in all of this.

Rami

Right, of course, how silly of me to assume—

Zidan

Rami, I'm sorry—

Rami

Nonono, Fifi says it exactly as it is, isn't that right?

Zidan

Surly you can understand—

Rami
I'll take care of this—

Zidan
Where are you going?

Rami
The fucking green line—

Zidan
Hunny, put this to rest for tonight.

Rami
I am trying!

Zidan
Why tonight?

Rami
Because I don't want to deal with this! I don't want to do this Zidan! I don't want any of this. It's his past. I don't even want to be here. This isn't my place, this isn't my home, this isn't my war. He told us to never return, to never ask, and to never even think of this place. And then he wants to be buried here. What the actual fuck?! And this necklace—and this photograph. Why? Why is he doing this? Why now?

Zidan
So you went to the gay club instead.

Rami
Yes! Because it's the only place I could think right.

Zidan
We're both awfully drunk, this isn't a good time to deal with this—

Rami
No, this is the best time frankly. I'm gonna to find this apartment and get rid of this (*he holds the necklace*).

Zidan
Rami—

RAMI exits abruptly.

Zidan
Fuck!

ZIDAN exits after him.

SCENE 11
For the Briefest Moment

Phone ringing. MONA enters.

YARA enters.

Yara
Hello—

Mona
Yara...

Yara
--

Mona
Please wait.

Yara
Why are you calling—

Mona
Wait, don't hang up the phone!

Yara
Forget this number Mona.

Mona
Congratulations!—

Yara
...

Mona
Are you still there?

Yara
Yes.

Mona
I just wanted to say congratulations...on your marriage.

Yara
Okay—

Mona
I know it was this weekend.

Yara
Yes.

Mona
I mean it Yara...I wish you so many blessings.

Yara
Thank you.

Mona
You're welcome.

Yara
...

Beat.

Mona
Are you still there?

Yara
Yes.

Mona
Okay.

Yara
Okay.

Beat.

Mona
How was it?

Yara
Mona—

Mona
How was the day?

Yara
Karam will be home soon. I have to go—

Mona
Yara I'm so sorry—

Yara
—don't...

Mona
Please...listen to me...what happened—what I did—

Yara
Forget about it—

Mona
I can't!

Yara
Forget about us—

Mona

You don't mean that.

Yara
I have to go.

Mona
I have a bird hanging from my neck –

Yara
What?

Mona
My mother gave me this necklace because it isn't God or Allah or Jesus or anyone who will save me. She gave me this phoenix so that I could die a hundred thousand deaths and still come back to life each time.

Yara
What are you talking about?

Mona
She told me to get an education, learn, then leave. And she gave me the wings to leave on.

Yara
You are so naive.

Mona
I never wanted the affections of men...

Yara
With your delusional fables—

Mona
I'm not sick.

Yara
You're a fool—

Mona
Stop this!

Yara
You stop! You don't know what's out there—

Mona
Yes! I do!

Yara
You don't know what it was like to have your mother wake you in the middle of the night and force you back to a hell hole refugee camp to find your father's dead body. You don't know what it's like to watch the tigers with their crosses spray bullets into your father. Into the hearts of all the men in our camp. They said if we so much as cried, we would be next. You don't understand that kind of terror. Or the kind of terror when Mama returned to the mass grave and tilled the earth with her bare claws, body after body, until she found his.

You don't know what it feels like for mother, daughter, and the gangrenous corps of a father to sit in a rundown truck barreling through the back roads of this city. She crossed the green line like it was a pedestrian crossing – all so she could give him a proper burial. That's all she wanted. That's all she needed. To bury him in a proper grave.

So, yes, I marry a living man, although my body aches at the thought, because I am not the only one making this choice.

Mona

I've buried my own share of death—or did you forget?

Yara

Did *you* forget?

Mona

No, I just started to believe there might be some life again when I met you.

Beat.

Mona

Naseeb has put the apartment for sale and we're moving to the mountains. I'm sure they'll marry me to someone, soon.

Yara

Oh no...

Mona

For a single moment, I truly believed a different future was imaginable. With you, I thought we could go somewhere far away and start over. We would make it our way, we are builders of homes. Isn't that right? Am I crazy? Am I?

I don't think I am.

But it was as if you were a bubble, Yara...and all of it has vanished into the air.

MONA hangs up. YARA lingers...then hangs up.

YARA exits.

SCENE 12
A Growing Green Line

MONA is sleeping on the living room couch by the phone. NASEEB enters.

Naseeb

The war was erupting, and we couldn't avoid it any longer. Mona, I moved us because I had no choice.

How is it that my spirit wakes up to the green line—here I am again, at our apartment, overlooking the green line.
Like a stitch across our face—

Mona

—we couldn't avoid it any longer—

Naseeb

I was doing what I saw best for our family—

Mona

—it's as if the green line surged—

Naseeb

I didn't mean to hurt you—

Mona

—like a tidal wave—

Naseeb

I was afraid in those days—

Mona

—and it came into our very home—

Naseeb

I had to leave.

Mona

Who did we become?

Light shift as NASEEB becomes RAMI.

Rami

I don't speak Arabic. I mean—my parents taught me Shukran. But that's it. Any other Arabic words I know, mostly bad words, I learned from an ex-lover. He was Palestinian. His name was Issa. Jesus in Arabic. We dated in my second year right up until the end of my undergrad. He's kinda sorta part of the reason I came out to my family. I mean, I was literally dating Jesus from Palestine, I felt pretty invincible. Until the fucker cheated on me.

You'd think it would be my mom, but it was my dad who heard me through all of that ordeal. He didn't have the words...he didn't know how to say what he was feeling...but I always felt I could come to him. I was helping him with some chores around the house and I started to cry. He just watched me. Then I went on a huge rant about Issa, cursing and fucking his name through heavy sobs. And he just listened, his eyes were moons, their gravity holding every single word.

Mona

I slept by the phone all night hoping she would call.

Shift. In MONA and NASEEB's apartment.

Naseeb
Did you sleep out here?

Mona
I must have...

Naseeb
You're tired.

Mona
Yes.

Naseeb
I'll make some coffee.

Mona
Okay.

Naseeb
We need to begin packing today. I don't want to hear anything about—

Mona
Okay.

Beat.

Naseeb
Okay?

Mona
Sure.

Naseeb
It's best this way.

Mona
What're we going to take?

Naseeb
Only the essentials.

Mona
What are the essentials?
Is this chair essential?
Are these books essential?
The lamp?
The rugs?
What are the essentials?

Naseeb
We'll figure it out—

Mona
They used to sit here and read books to us...

Naseeb
Yeah.

Mona
You remember that?

Naseeb
I do.

Mona
When we were children, we'd cram around this chair and baba would read As-sindubad al-bahriyi.

Naseeb
Right...that's right.

Mona
Sinbad would hook onto the largest bird in existence—

Naseeb
Yes—

Mona
And fly to mount Qaf.

Naseeb
The highest place on Earth.

Mona
I wish I could go there.

Beat.

Naseeb
Let's pack.

Mona
You've gone cold Naseeb.

Naseeb
And you're still a child.

Mona
Of course, you're the adult taking care of us—I don't know what you'd do without Tarik holding your hand.

Naseeb
Watch it Mona.

Mona
You've made a hard shell around your soul, you know that?

Naseeb
Enough.

Mona
It's the truth.

Naseeb
Stop.

Mona
You've become the very gun you're trying to avoid.

Naseeb
Shut up—

Mona
Mama and baba wouldn't want this—they would be disappointed with who you've become—

Naseeb
Mona!

Mona
Baba told me to get an education because you would never be able to—

Naseeb
YOU SHUT YOUR MOUTH YOU STUPID LITTLE GIRL!

NASEEB grabs MONA by the hair and prepares to slap her. She screams.

He releases her abruptly.

Stillness.

Light shift as NASEEB becomes RAMI.

Rami
You mentioned the war one time. I came home from school and told you that we had a sit in today. The entire student body sat out in the field in protest to a new school policy against the use of cellphones—so silly, I know—but it seemed like the most important thing in junior high. You began to speak of your friend—Tarik—during the war. You said he was so slavishly ideological—how he believed in his cause with the conviction of a mountain. You began to tell me how you took up arms and battled in the clashes of your city. And I tried to imagine you with a gun. You, this gentle man who works softly with his hard hands. You said “Unwavering conviction is admirable only in the mind.”

I didn't know what you meant but I knew that I didn't want to imagine you in that war.

So why bring me here now?

What is there to find here?

RAMI exits.

SCENE 13
An Eternal Kiss

MONA is packing. A knock on the door.

Mona
Coming—

She opens the door to find YARA.

Mona
Oh my god—

Yara
Hello.

Mona
Yara...

Yara
How are you?

Mona
What're you doing here?

Yara
I wanted...I needed...to see you.

Mona
Are you okay?

Yara
Is your brother home?

Mona
He stepped out...

Beat.

Mona
Come...come in—

Yara
No, thank you...

Mona
Are you okay?

Yara
I'm fine.

Mona
How is Karam?

Yara
He's...good.

Beat.

Mona
Yara, this is strange...to see you.

Yara
I know.

Mona
Is everything okay?

Yara
I wanted to send you off...

Mona
Right.

Yara
The mountains are beautiful. It'll give you some quiet.

Mona
So I keep being told—why does it feel like it'll bring me the opposite.

Yara
Mona...I care about you a lot.

Mona
...

Yara
What you said—on the phone...

Mona
Why are you here?

Yara
They'll marry you off... and you'll live a quiet life.

Mona
I'm making some peace with it—

Yara
I started imagining you...in a quiet life...

Beat.

Yara
That's not life at all for you. Where would all your wonder fit in a quiet life?

Mona
Are you here to hurt me?

Yara
When I feel the weight of Karam on my body, it's like a rock is pressed against my chest.

Beat.

Yara
This gentle man becomes a giant when we share a bed.

Mona
Yara...

Yara
I don't know how much longer I could bare it.

Mona
Oh god...

Yara
Let's run away.

Mona
What?

Yara
Through the green line...through the mountains. Through the deserts and the seas. We'll say goodbye to everything and everyone we know and start somewhere else.

Mona
Are you crazy?

Yara
Yes.

Mona
Yara what are you talking about.

Yara
I'll help you move. I'll help you move to the mountain, that's what we'll say. Everything will be in the car and in the middle of the night we'll go.

Mona
To where?

Yara
To the neighbouring countries... I don't care, you imagine. You imagine.

Mona
I have to think about this—

Yara
This is your idea—

Mona
Yara—

Yara
I don't want to live without you. I don't want to—the first time I saw you it was as if we looked at each other for a hundred thousand years.

I love you Mona. I love you very much and I am so sorry it took me this long to learn this.

YARA kisses MONA – an eternal kiss.

Mona

We leave at the end of the week.

They kiss again. YARA exits.

SCENE 14
How A Soul Says Goodbye

RAMI *enters on his phone, looking for the green line on Google.*

He notices MONA.

They look at each other of few beats.

Rami
Excuse me, do you know where the green line is?

She exits abruptly.

Rami
Wait—

ZIDAN *enters.*

Zidan
Rami!

Rami
Zidan?

Zidan
(*out of breath*) Hey...hi...holy shit, you quick little minx, you disappeared on me.

Rami
What do you want?

Zidan
I got you a drink.

Rami
What?

ZIDAN *pulls out a bottle of beer. Holds it out to RAMI.*

Rami
I think we've drank enough.

Zidan
Please—

Rami
You're pushy.

Zidan
And you're crazy—

Rami
(*Sarcastic*) Great! Thanks.

Zidan
Have it. I got one myself.

He pulls out another one for himself. He sets down the bottle and opens his own. He takes a big swig.

Zidan
I think you're crazy but—

Another swig.

Zidan
But I want to have one more drink with you.

Rami
No thanks.

Zidan
Oh really?—

Rami
—Bye

RAMI starts to head off.

Zidan
You're going the wrong way, foreigner.

Rami
You know what/

Zidan
What?

Rami
/you're a condescending asshole Zidan. You call me foreigner, you buy me drinks like you're doing me a favour/

Zidan
/Woah, slow down sweetie/

Rami
/you call me a liar, you make up all these stories about me, you push me to drink/

Zidan
/Stop stop stop stop stop stop! Please stop moving your mouth.

Rami
Wow.

Zidan
I'm here to help you—

Rami
You've helped enough.

Zidan
I'm sorry—

Rami

“Please stop moving your mouth.” You’re an asshole—

Zidan
I’m sorry!

Rami
I had this stupid fucking idea that maybe this was meant to happen. That we were meant to meet.

Zidan
Rami...

Rami
Over there—across the ocean—I am myself, so singularly myself, I get all the benefits of being by myself. But my parents....my father...his broken English...his accent...made me feel like I was part of something else. And then he gives me this necklace, and it’s a bird, a phoenix. And, tonight, I looked at you right after his funeral and you were dressed like this necklace and I wanted to believe that maybe this all actually meant something—that I was in the right place at the right time... that I’m supposed to be on this land at this time for a reason—I could feel him all around me all night.

Zidan
Woah...

Rami
UGH!

Zidan
That was intense.

Beat.

Rami
I am crazy.

RAMI picks up the bottle and takes a swig.

Zidan
If you’re crazy then so am I.

Rami
What?

Zidan
I had a dream about you a week ago.

Rami
What?

Zidan
You had vines growing out of your body. They kept growing and twisting and you were extending your arms out, desperately trying to escape. Eventually all I could see were your eyes and your fingers before the plants entirely devoured you.

Rami
You’re lying.

Zidan

I'm not—

Rami

...

They both take a swig.

Zidan

You remember when I told you about that day when my father hit me...

Rami

Yes.

Zidan

He never hit me after then. My mother made sure of it. She explained to me that everything born eventually dies and is returned to the universe.

Rami

Thanks but that's something we say to comfort each other—

MONA *enters.*

On her house phone.

Mona

We're ready to leave.

Yara

Okay.

Mona

I've told Naseeb you're helping us with the move.

Yara

Okay—

Mona

Tarik will meet us outside the city.

Yara

And then tonight we will leave?

Mona

Yes.

Yara

We'll keep driving?

Mona

Yes.

Zidan

She said at first, there is blackness, a heaviness in the days and weeks after someone dies that even the living feel. Then the soul awakens, and it does not remember where it is, what it does, who it is, and why it is. It swims through the channels of the body until it escapes the skin.

Rami
Right...

Zidan
The soul floats just above the body, watching and not watching. Dispersed and suspended. Whole and not easily understood. Near its physical vessel, it celebrates and mourns in a celestial dance, swimming in and out of the body. Then... it takes its first breath.

Beat.

Rami
What happens next?

Zidan
Some souls are said to go to another plane immediately – what happens then, no one ever knows. Other souls transmigrate into another body, sometimes that of a human, other times that of an animal, and even sometimes that of a tree.

Rami
Zidan what is this about—

Yara
I'm afraid—

Mona
I'm jumping now—from the crane—

Yara
I've only ever known bullets and battered bodies.

Mona
I pray that my wings will hold us both.

Zidan
But some souls wait. Some souls wait cycling through a life time of memories trying to make sense of something.

Beat.

Rami
Do you mean he's waiting?

Zidan
She told me that these souls must wait to hear a message or finish an important mission.

Rami
I could feel him all day.

Zidan
I want to help you.

Yara
How did we get here?

Mona
I've known you for a hundred thousand years—

Yara
We said—

Mona
—we'll run away—

Yara
—through the green line—

Mona
—through the mountains—

Yara
—the deserts—

Mona
—and the seas—

Yara
We'll say goodbye to everything and everyone we know—

Mona
—to be with—

Yara/Mona
—You

Mona
To feel you—

Yara
—to kiss you—

Mona
—to love you—

Yara
I've always loved you—

Mona
How long have we been here?

Rami
I miss him...

Zidan
How long has it been since he left this city?

Rami
40 years.

Yara
40 years.

We've been here 40 years.

Mona
I remember.

Yara
We were running away...

Mona
I know—

Yara
We were laughing—

Mona
Oh god.

Yara
I remember it all—

Mona
I wish I didn't—

Shift.

SCENE 15
Death Comes in the Fall of Night

Mona
That morning—

Yara
—The air was wet with a heavy fog—

Naseeb
—I was afraid in those days—

Mona
Yara came to our apartment and helped with the last of the packing—

Naseeb
—I was a little boy—

Yara
—and when everything was in the car I had realized something—

Mona
—it would be the last time I would be with my brother—

Yara
—It was the only time I had spent with Naseeb—

Naseeb
—I'd heard about Yara and only knew her in passing—

Mona
—And the last time I would see my childhood home—

Naseeb
—Yara and Mona—

Mona
—Leaving behind the memories of Mama and Baba—

Naseeb
—I'd heard—

Mona
—leaving my brother—

Lights shift, outside the apartment, as they prepare to leave in the car.

Mona
Wait wait! Naseeb—

Naseeb
What?

Mona
Stand right there—by the entrance—I want a photo of you.

Naseeb

It's not the time.

Mona
Please, we'll do it quickly.

Naseeb
Let's go—

Mona
Naseeb! It's the least you could do.

Naseeb
Fine.

NASEEB stands, disgruntled, in front of the apartment. MONA snaps the photo and returns the camera to her backpack.

Mona
Why are you upset? This is exactly what you wanted.

Naseeb
Let's go—

They get in the car.

Yara
I was in the backseat listening to the soft music of the radio and thinking that this will be the last time I drive these roads. Ahead of us the road forks and forks again, splitting at every avenue. The mountains rising ahead, the city thundering below, the sky—a steel blanket heavy on our body. I had a small backpack—and I thought this is not the first time I've lived out of a small backpack for a short time. I thought of Karam, how I left him his favorite meal on the table before walking out the door. I thought of my mother, the warrior woman, and how I lied to her and told her that I would be back soon before I kissed her cheeks for the last time. I watched the buildings streak by the window, their stones crumbling relics of a better time. And then Mona looks at me and I remember what I have always known.

She is my wings.

Mona
—We drive along dusty paths and back roads—

Naseeb
There's a crossing down here—

Mona
You're sure it's safe?

Yara
He doesn't respond.

Mona
Naseeb—

Yara
He still doesn't respond.

Mona

—we drive through a canopy of twisted trees—

Yara

—I feel the shaytauns and demons bearing their teeth—

Mona

Where are we going?

Yara

—he drives into the green line—

Mona

Why did we stop? What's going on?

Beat.

Naseeb

Get out.

Mona

What?

Naseeb

Get out of the car...

Mona

What's happening?

Naseeb

GET OUT!

Mona

Naseeb what are we doing?

NASEEB withdraws a gun from his pocket.

Mona

Naseeb!

Yara

Oh god—

Naseeb

Get out—

He is panicked, shaking, frantic, trying to keep it together.

Naseeb

What have you been doing?

Mona

Naseeb!

Naseeb

What have you done?

Mona
Wait—

Naseeb
I only wanted to care for us Mona.

Yara
Oh god.

NASEEB raises the gun.

Naseeb
The rumours...

Mona
Please wait—

Naseeb
People were talking...I didn't want to believe them—

Mona
Naseeb wait—

Naseeb
And then I saw you—

Yara
—I have only ever known bullets and battered bodies—

Naseeb
—kissing her—

He aims the gun at YARA.

Yara
Mona—

Mona
—Naseeb please no, wait, please no!!!!

Yara
—I didn't cry—

Mona
You don't have to do this!

Yara
—I didn't beg—

Naseeb
I do—

Yara
—I was no longer angry, armored, or suspicious—

Naseeb

I'm sorry...

Yara

—All the decorum's of our uncivil war come to play in this hour—

NASEEB *shoots* YARA four times.

Yara

I lie—another body—one, two, three, four, bullets in my chest—I lie—another body—eaten by the green line.

She dies.

MONA *wails over her body.*

NASEEB *holds the gun steady. He knows what he's supposed to do next.*

MONA *meets his gaze.*

Mona

Do it.

NASEEB *hesitates.*

Mona

DO IT YOU FUCKING COWARD!

NASEEB *lets out a yell, he is frozen. He approaches MONA. He rips the necklace from her neck.*

Naseeb

You are not a part of this family.

MONA cries.

Naseeb

Go—go back—go back to the apartment!—

MONA lies beside the body of YARA. NASEEB escapes in the car towards the mountain.

It begins to rain.

Mona

I laid beside you for what must have been an eternity. I saw the sun and the moon dance through heavy lidded clouds and let the rain sink our bodies into the mud. I wailed and I cried—Yara—come back to me Yara. Please, please, come back to me, please! Sleep came and went and one night, when the moon was at its largest, I could have sworn the Jinns and faeries hidden in these celestial canopies came to me.

And I begged them to bring you back. Take me and bring you back.

Naseeb

I open my eyes in the green line and I'm afraid the demons and shaytauns await me.

Mona

I pray for rebirth.

Naseeb

And as I walk through the foliage, I am naked. And I see my fists and they are claws and I see my feet and they are sharp like talons.

Mona

Can you hold in your heart what pain you've brought me? What tormented fragments left in my soul can't, don't, won't fight any longer. Naseeb, you carry a legacy folded in the slits of your skin and a curse that rests in your spirit. I didn't choose this war, it came knocking at my door in the middle of the night as the image of a beautiful brown eyed goddess. It came as militia men holding AK47s as the center piece of our evening dinner. It came when her blood waters our gardens and the petals of our flowers grow like razors.

Oh, I wish I could change it!

I am stuck here, playing these memories, searching for a way to have done it differently. Where could we have changed our course? You—the brother you should have been. Me, the woman I wanted to be. Yara, my Yara, with me, beyond the green line, beyond the mountains, the valleys, and the deserts. Where could we have changed our course?

Naseeb

I ran away—Beyond the mountains—and I never knew what happened to you. I imagine you were left there, on the green line. Your bodies left to rot amongst the plants and trees growing from the copper soil. Cracking your skin, twisting into your spine, leaves and roots absorbing the life left pulsing in your body. I imagine that no one went looking for you and that you were stuck. Eaten by the green line.

Beat.

Mona

You never knew if I stayed to die.

Naseeb

Until you sent me that photograph...and you wrote on it "Naseeb, 1981" – and my years of forgetfulness came erupting back.

Mona

We can't change what's come any more than we can ask the mountains to dance. We are all servants to the speeding bullet of time and none of us can turn it around. So we keep running, we carry the wounds on our back and hold the scars in our fists, and we wonder if there will be a time when bullet shells turn to flowers.

MONA helps YARA to her feet. They move through space, in memory. MONA releases YARA.

YARA exits.

MONA follows.

SCENE 16
FIGURE OUT THIS ENDING FULLY!!!

ZIDAN enters. He is with RAMI. Their next day.

Zidan

Where Damascus meets Independence, in the apartment overlooking the green line. This is where the green line used to run.

Rami

It's hard to imagine.

Zidan

We've worked very hard to forget about it.

Rami

I imagine.

Zidan

Is this it?

RAMI holds the photograph up to compare.

Rami

This looks like it.

Zidan

Are you sure you want to do this?

Rami

No...yes...I don't know—

Zidan

Hah—after all this, I think you owe it to yourself.

Rami

What if I don't like what I find.

Zidan

You might not.

Rami

Zidan, what would you do?

Zidan

I would find the closest gay bar and get wasted with a total stranger. *(He smiles)*

Rami

(he laughs) You're still a jerk.

Zidan

And you're still cute.

Rami

Here goes nothing.

Zidan
Rami—

Rami
Yes?

Zidan
Just remember—when we look back, we want to believe we're better than the worst parts of us. As a place, as a people, as a person. I want to remember that my dad is the man who baked fresh bread every Sunday after church and not the man who hit the tears out of my eyes. These violent pasts don't make any sense when we're always trying to convince ourselves that we are fundamentally okay. Or maybe these violent pasts remind us that we're still not okay.

Rami
Memory is a funny thing—so quiet if left undisturbed.

Zidan
So why disturb it?

Rami
I don't know if I have an answer to that.

Beat.

It begins to rain.

MONA and YARA enter.

Rami
This rain feels so good.

Zidan
Yeah...

ZIDAN kisses RAMI

Zidan
Will you come back, foreigner?

Rami
There might be something here after all...

They kiss again. Zidan plays a song off of his phone.

Mona
Rami?

Yara
They can't hear you.

Mona
That's our necklace.

Yara
Mona...

Mona
I love that song.

Yara
We can go now...

Beat.

Yara
We can go...

MONA *watches as RAMI and ZIDAN dance and drink to the song.*

Mona
Rami—

RAMI *looks at her.*

Yara
Let's go my love...I'm waiting for you...

Mona
He can see us.

Beat.

I think he can see us.

Fade to black.

Blackout.

THE END